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THE POLITICAL UTILITY OF  
STRATEGIC SUPERIORITY:  
A Preliminary Investigation Into the Soviet View

Karl F. Spielmann

May 1979

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(cont) paper then isolates the political aspect of current treatment of the strategic superiority problem and suggests ways of examining this aspect more effectively. Such ways include examining Soviet behavior as a strategic nuclear power and in the European theater context; exploring Soviet commentary and the drawbacks of doing so; and the use of decisionmaking analyses.

The paper tentatively concludes that strategic superiority would have utility for the Soviets as a background factor to their foreign policy actions.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Is the United States as a strategic nuclear power about to become second to that other great strategic nuclear power, the Soviet Union? If so, what might be the results? These are complicated and, from a national security standpoint, momentous questions that deserve the closest and most careful scrutiny. This study has been undertaken to make a partial contribution to that end. It takes its cue from the fact that what Soviet strategic superiority might signify for us will depend in the first instance on what it might signify for the Soviets.

The significance that the Soviets attach to attainment of strategic superiority will obviously determine their incentives for seeking it, how they would define it (in the sense of what levels and kinds of forces would really represent superiority), and the ways in which they would attempt to exploit it. Accordingly, the first order of business for Western analysts is to confront the question of how to determine how important strategic superiority is to the Soviets. This study is intended to identify topics relevant to such a determination and, to the extent possible, point the way for further pertinent analyses.

The study maintains that three aspects of the problem should guide the analyst: (1) the pursuit of the goal of superiority may be only one of a number of possible explanations for the Soviet strategic buildup that has provoked Western concerns with the topic; (2) what is at issue is not the significance of strategic superiority per se but rather Soviet attitudes toward such superiority; and (3) Soviet strategic nuclear superiority would be an unprecedented phenomenon. Surveying recent Western commentary on the problem, the study finds that analysis thus far has not, on the whole, been guided by



these three considerations. Studies have tended to rely on inferences about Soviet perspectives drawn directly from evolving Soviet strategic capabilities, evaluations of what strategic superiority would mean (or not mean) in the abstract, conceptions of the relationship between strategic nuclear means and political ends that seem more Western than Soviet, and rather glib citations of historical events (the Cuban missile crisis or various examples of distasteful Soviet actions) to support surmises about how the Soviet Union is likely to behave as a strategic superior.

Overall, while the common assumption is that Soviet strategic superiority would, as the most practical and immediate effect, encourage untoward foreign policy behavior by the U.S.S.R. (and untoward reactions by other countries to the Soviets), there has been very little analysis of the actual foreign policy significance to the Soviets of strategic nuclear superiority. In seeking to remedy this inadequacy, the study focuses on three major sources of information pertinent to Soviet perceptions of the political utility of strategic superiority. While these are not the only sources that might be used and each has considerable deficiencies, if they are explored in depth and in combination they facilitate reasoned deliberation on the problem. Their use is particularly commended because, as indicated by the amount of commentary on the problem thus far, our own inability to know for sure what goes on in the minds of Soviet leaders does not deter us from making judgments about the foreign policy significance of Soviet strategic superiority.

The first major source examined in the study is the historical record. Because of the unprecedented nature of Soviet strategic superiority the analyst must rely here on imperfect precedents and analogues. Existing analyses of the historical record have been notable for their failure to evaluate systematically the relative importance of the strategic balance as a determinant of particular Soviet foreign policy activities. A survey of the literature shows, however, that at least five

relatively recent studies have sought to survey Soviet foreign policy behavior with a view to examining Soviet reliance on the military as an instrument of foreign policy and the Soviet propensity for risk-taking. As temporary surrogates for analyses focusing on the strategic balance factor, these studies on the whole do not confirm the popular image of the Soviet Union as a militarily aggressive country with a propensity for taking risks. Moreover, they emphasize the significance of local rather than strategic nuclear balances.

The studies are generally not recent enough to have taken into account Soviet adventures in Angola or Ethiopia. And while their message implies that attainment of strategic superiority would not encourage the Soviets to foment crises or engage in more or less direct confrontations with the United States, they leave unexplored the question of how valuable strategic superiority would be in situations requiring application of more subtle and indirect pressure to achieve Soviet foreign policy aims.

This study briefly notes the insights determined exploration of the Cuban missile crisis and Soviet superiority vis-à-vis China may afford future analysts of the Soviet strategic superiority problem. The study focuses, however, on the European analogue to see what conclusions the Soviets might derive (or have derived) from the utility of their local superiority in the European theater context over the years. The analysis explores an apparent anomaly: that Soviet reliance on threatening or using force in Europe decreased as Soviet conventional, theater nuclear, and strategic nuclear status improved in the 1960's and 1970's. This suggests on the whole that the Soviets are aware that military force can best be exploited to achieve foreign policy aims if it is kept in the background and is nonthreatening. Indeed, combining efforts at accommodation--particularly in the form of engaging in various negotiations--with a military buildup can prove

beneficial from both a military and foreign policy standpoint. More exploration of these aspects of Soviet behavior in Europe, rather than crisis situations, nuclear blackmail prospects, and the like, is recommended.

The second major source of information that the study evaluates is Soviet pronouncements. While these have been a popular source over the years for Western analysts of the Soviet--especially the Soviet military--scene, they are much too unreliable to be depended on as a sound guide to Soviet intentions. They lend themselves rather easily to biased and selective interpretation. These pronouncements can prove to be useful as a supplementary source, provided the analyst makes every effort to read them in the context of both internal Soviet events and Soviet military and foreign policy activities and programs.

In analyzing the use of Soviet pronouncements, the study examines two key Soviet "doctrinal" topics on which Western analysts have tended to focus in assessing the evolving Soviet strategic threat and Soviet interest in strategic superiority. Soviet statements regarding the "political nature of nuclear war" and the "correlation of forces" are not simply indicators of a Soviet belief and interest in winning a nuclear war or of Soviet reliance on the military as an instrument of foreign policy. Regarding these topics in the broader and more appropriate context of Soviet political, ideological, and economic concerns, rather than in narrowly military terms, suggests a Soviet conviction that strategic nuclear might--and perhaps even strategic nuclear superiority--would have a subtle, significant, but not necessarily an overtly threatening foreign policy value. Further detailed analyses of these and other Soviet doctrinal topics, in which more heed is paid to the question of context, would be useful.

The final major source of information which the study explores is the use of decisionmaking analyses. As is the case



with the other sources examined, there are inherent difficulties in the use of such analyses, especially in a setting where our knowledge of the components and relationships involved is incomplete. Nevertheless, since all of our explanations of Soviet purposes, motives, and intentions ultimately rest on implicit assumptions about the nature of the processes that permit these factors to determine decisions, the explicit attention to such processes that decisionmaking analyses mandate seems well worthwhile.

The study recommends the use of a decisionmaking approach that emphasizes that the top Soviet leaders are national authorities with personal concerns about foreign policy issues (be these concerns ideological, economic, or of a more straightforward foreign policy nature). The national leadership approach developed by the author in a previous study seems particularly well suited for this purpose.

Indications that the Soviets are attentive to image considerations (rather than just combat-effectiveness criteria) in designing their force structure, revealed in the Soviet emphasis on size, numbers, and the like, suggest that political-foreign policy concerns may have a direct effect on Soviet strategic arms efforts, influencing the development, production, and deployment of the strategic arms themselves. This does not square with widely held assumptions in the West about the role of the professional military in shaping Soviet strategic arms efforts. These assumptions should be reconsidered and the nature and actual role of the aforementioned image considerations reevaluated to assess whether they are really the product of purposive political rather than military calculation. The national leadership approach is commended here (along with specific attention to the question of Soviet views on the combat utility of strategic superiority).

The study concludes that there is some basis for asserting a Soviet belief in the value of strategic superiority as an instrument of foreign policy. Such superiority would appear to be valued more for its general utility as part of background power than for facilitating direct exploitation of strategic nuclear capabilities to secure foreign policy gains.

## INTRODUCTION

To paraphrase Marx, there is a specter haunting the defense communities of the West--the specter of Soviet strategic nuclear superiority. Raised by the continuing alarming Soviet strategic nuclear arms buildup, this specter tempts us to respond by either reaching for our guns or closing our eyes and pretending there is really nothing there to worry about. To counsel patience here does not court disaster, however, for the most constructive initial response is to make a serious attempt to determine just what it is that confronts us. But as with any specter that is more easily said than done. For determining what the results of Soviet attainment of strategic nuclear superiority will be is a problem as intellectually elusive as it is potentially threatening.

This study was undertaken as a first step in trying to make such a determination--particularly in regard to political implications. Because of its potential significance to the West, the meaning of Soviet achievement of strategic nuclear superiority (however one might define that superiority) is clearly deserving of the most extensive scrutiny. However, because this meaning is so elusive, more than a little analytical effort has to be devoted at the outset to determining what questions we should be asking in order to discover the significance of Soviet strategic nuclear superiority for us. The purpose of this study is to help make such a determination.

It is recognized that although this study basically provides a point of departure for other studies, it cannot simply be open ended. Accordingly, some tentative conclusions will be presented, both on what Soviet strategic superiority means



from a foreign policy standpoint and on what avenues of investigation might most successfully be followed in order to better determine that meaning. By way of laying the foundation for our inquiry, let us take note of some of the more obvious generalities germane to any consideration of the phenomenon of Soviet superiority in strategic nuclear arms. This will illustrate both why the phenomenon of superiority is so difficult to pin down and why the question of the meaning of Soviet strategic superiority has not received the careful assessment it deserves.

PART ONE  
DEFINING THE PROBLEM



I

SOME PRELIMINARY ANALYTICAL GUIDELINES

Three general considerations seem to be particularly relevant guidelines to an assessment of the significance of Soviet strategic superiority.

First, while it is the recent Soviet strategic buildup that has raised the superiority specter, there may very well be a number of reasons for that buildup, of which conscious and deliberate pursuit of strategic nuclear superiority may not even be the most important.

Second, although in the final analysis we are of course most concerned with what the implications of Soviet strategic superiority might be for us, we should not forget that in attempting to determine this meaning, it is the Soviet, not the American views, of the issue that should properly be explored.

And third, the phenomenon under examination is in important respects unique: not only has the development of nuclear weapons already raised questions about the nature and value of military superiority, but also Soviet achievement of superiority in the nuclear age would be unprecedented.

These basic considerations help define the process of inquiry, suggesting that certain lines of analysis should be pursued and certain pitfalls should be avoided. These considerations also suggest that there is a lot more to the process than meets the eye.

A. SUPERIORITY AS A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR THE SOVIET STRATEGIC BUILDUP

The Soviet strategic buildup has been disturbing for a number of reasons. It poses a specific threat to the

survivability of the ICBM component of the U.S. strategic triad (bombers, ICBM's and SLBM's), as a consequence of the continued Soviet emphasis on large ICBM's in conjunction with considerable progress in improving missile accuracy and exploiting MIRV techniques. Concern with this situation has been indirectly buttressed by evidence of a Soviet civil defense effort that may decrease Soviet worries about the consequences of retaliation should the U.S.S.R. strike first at U.S. ICBM's. Concern has also been prompted by the fact that such missile development has occurred at a time when SALT had led many to hope that the U.S.S.R. would exercise restraint in strategic programs. Moreover, the Soviets are apparently willing to support all other significant elements of their overall force posture while their strategic buildup proceeds: witness the attention given to a "blue-water" naval capability, the increments in the Soviet conventional capability vis-à-vis NATO, and (in the form of the mobile SS-20 missile, new fighter aircraft, and the Backfire bomber) the watershed recently achieved in the Soviet theater nuclear threat to Western Europe. And finally, the Soviet strategic nuclear buildup has been accompanied by a number of Soviet ventures--most notably in Angola and Ethiopia--that disappoint the expectations roused by détente that the desire to foster businesslike relations with the West would encourage the U.S.S.R. to be less aggressive in the world at large.

The extent to which a conscious Soviet desire to attain strategic superiority can serve as a reasonable explanation of the Soviet strategic buildup depends on both the kind of case one can make for this line of argument and the cases that can be made for alternative explanations. However, we are concerned here only with identifying and, to the extent feasible, tentatively evaluating the various elements of the analytical processes that can establish whether the Soviet buildup is a result of Soviet pursuit of strategic superiority as an

explicit goal. Therefore, we are not concerned as much with the possible validity of specific alternative explanations of the Soviet strategic buildup as we are with discerning what considerations are germane to the proper analysis of any explanation.

Other explanations might include the idea that the Soviet strategic buildup is basically a deliberate reaction to U.S. strategic arms developments (both the U.S. edge in the early 1960's and, presumably, U.S. qualitative advances since then)<sup>1</sup>; the buildup may be explained largely as the product of a kind of blind momentum in strategic arms R&D and production built into the Soviet defense-industrial system<sup>2</sup>; or the buildup may be presented as consonant with a peculiarly Soviet view of deterrence and what it takes to make deterrence work but not as necessarily indicative of aggressive or expansionist intent.<sup>3</sup> These are not the only alternative lines of argument that might be advanced, nor are they even necessarily mutually exclusive.

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Bernard Brodie, *The Development of Nuclear Strategy*, ACIS Working Paper No. 11, Center for Arms Control and International Security (Los Angeles: University of California, February 1978), pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup>This point of view is succinctly stated, criticized, and to some extent also implicitly endorsed in Colin Gray, "Soviet Rocket Forces: Military Capability, Political Utility," *Air Force Magazine* 61(3). For the statement and criticism see p. 52; for the implicit endorsement see the assertions on the impact and immutable nature of the Soviet defense R&D and production process on p. 50.

<sup>3</sup>The idea that asymmetries in the U.S. and Soviet strategic force postures are the result of two different concepts of deterrence (i.e., deterrence by the threat to punish or deterrence by denying military advantage) rather than a consequence of a Soviet effort to attain a superiority that "can be translated into diplomatic, political and military gains" is advanced in Dennis Ross, *Rethinking Soviet Strategic Policy: Inputs and Implications*, ACIS Working Paper No. 5, Center for Arms Control and International Security (Los Angeles: University of California, June 1977), pp. 3-24. This argument is buttressed to some extent by the "defense-industrial" momentum explanation of Soviet strategic arms acquisitions, pp. 24-28.



There may be multiple reasons for the Soviet strategic buildup--including the pursuit of strategic superiority. However, the first requirement for proper analysis of any explanation is that it be examined discretely.

Examination of the pursuit explanation as a discrete entity reveals that if we adopt it, we must be prepared to defend two basic assumptions: that the Soviets intend to do certain things with strategic superiority once it is attained, and that the Soviets intend to achieve it in order to do these particular things. The key word here is intend.<sup>4</sup> To make a convincing case that the buildup in Soviet strategic arms reflects a Soviet interest in achieving strategic superiority, it is necessary to bear in mind that what is involved in such an explanation is an assumption of purposive actions. It is thus necessary to estimate both the extent to which strategic superiority has been valued according to Soviet criteria and show that this could have affected choices between various weapons programs and defense and foreign policies.

There is yet another analytical requirement for proving purposive Soviet pursuit of strategic superiority. The asymmetries in the U.S. and Soviet strategic force postures that have resulted from the Soviet buildup can be equally well explained, at least in theory, by the action-reaction hypothesis, the defense-industrial momentum hypothesis, or the peculiarly Soviet deterrence concept hypothesis. Therefore, one cannot claim proof of the strategic superiority hypothesis merely by arguing that such asymmetries would result from a policy

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<sup>4</sup>It is true that from a purely logical standpoint, of course, both assumptions are not necessary. It is possible that strategic superiority could have some considerable value for the Soviets, yet not affect their behavior; they could value it without actively seeking it. Conversely, it is also possible that the Soviets would seek strategic superiority without even the haziest notion of what achieving it might mean.

designed to attain strategic superiority.<sup>5</sup> There is much more to making the case than simply discussing capabilities and inferring from the fact of these capabilities the Soviet intention to achieve and do something with them. Unless it can be shown by detailed and systematic comparison that these capabilities are consistent only with one particular hypothesis of Soviet behavior, focusing on capabilities only cannot establish or deny Soviet purposefulness with regard to the pursuit of strategic superiority

It should be emphasized, however, that we are not suggesting that these asymmetries should not be of concern to analysts and policymakers in their own right. The Soviet Union could attain a position of de facto strategic superiority over the United States, regardless of what the Soviet motivation had been.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, no responsible Western policymaker could afford to ignore what such superior capabilities would permit the U.S.S.R. to do. Yet even operating on the assumption that (as was once said of the British with regard to their empire) the Soviets acquired strategic superiority in a fit of

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<sup>5</sup>Obviously the case could be strengthened by a demonstration that such capabilities were more consistent with the strategic superiority hypothesis than with other hypotheses. That presumably would involve the analyst in a serious comparative effort to determine systematically whether and to what extent the kinds of systems that would result from the Soviet pursuit of strategic superiority would differ from those that would result from the Soviets acting in accord with the other hypotheses. This would seem to be a worthwhile analytical effort in any event, given the magnitude of our concern about the significance of the evolving Soviet strategic threat, but would appear to be particularly necessary if, in arguing on behalf of the strategic superiority hypothesis, the analyst focused mainly on systems and gave short shrift to analyzing systematically Soviet perspectives on the value of strategic superiority (i.e., the subject matter of this study).

<sup>6</sup>The lack of prior intent, however, may not be much comfort should the Soviets be able to convince themselves of their superiority in the midst of a crisis with the United States.

absentmindedness, sooner or later it would be prudent to make estimates of intent, simply in order to help establish appropriate Western priorities to forestall the possible Soviet actions resulting from Soviet appreciation of their own superiority.

#### B. FOCUSING ON SOVIET ATTITUDES

American concern with Soviet attainment of strategic superiority is in part rooted in the uncertainty of not knowing whether the Soviets are seeking such superiority purposefully, presumably for more or less ominous reasons. It is therefore appropriate to ask first what the Soviets might expect to gain by achieving strategic superiority, since these expected gains are what would motivate their actions. Thus, the process of determining the significance of Soviet strategic superiority involves at least an implicit assessment of the Soviet evaluation of it.

This does not mean, of course, that one should confuse Soviet expectations with what might actually come to pass. It does mean, however, that an abstract assessment of the value of strategic superiority in the nuclear era misses the point. What is important is how the Soviets assess it. Analysts should not take their cue from former Secretary of State Kissinger's famous remark on the topic, "What in the name of God is strategic superiority?"<sup>7</sup> The more pertinent query is what in the name of Lenin or Brezhnev or the Soviet General Staff strategic superiority might be.

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<sup>7</sup>*The New York Times*, July 4, 1974. Kissinger's remark implies that even if the Soviets should attain strategic superiority they still cannot escape certain inherent realities of the strategic nuclear relationship with the United States that would render such "superiority" unexploitable in any significant way in peacetime or in war. However, in recent interviews (see, for example, *The Economist*, February 3-9 and 10-17, 1979) the former Secretary has expressed much more unease at the prospect than his earlier query suggests.



It should be made clear, however, that in accepting the idea that the Soviets may well have their own criteria by which to evaluate the desirability of attaining strategic superiority--criteria that may not make much sense to the Deity or certain Western strategists--we do not by any means assume that they do necessarily desire strategic superiority. In no sense do we mean to imply that the Soviets are purposefully striving to attain strategic superiority and that the only unknowns that must be defined are their reasons for doing so and what would constitute an appropriate Western response. What we are examining is only one possible explanation for the recent disturbing buildup in Soviet strategic weaponry.

### C. A NOVEL PROBLEM

Strategic analysts have been grappling for most of the period since World War II with the new issues raised by the fact that the immense destructiveness of nuclear weapons challenges traditional premises on the practicality of using force to achieve state goals.<sup>8</sup> One of the results of nuclear destructiveness is that the question of how to avoid war,

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<sup>8</sup>This is not the place to give an extensive bibliography of the strategic literature dealing with this phenomenon, since the topic has been a thread if not a dominant theme in almost all Western writings on strategy in the nuclear age. For a small but enlightening sample see Bernard Brodie, et al., *The Absolute Weapon* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946); Henry Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1957); Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Klaus Knorr, *On the Uses of Military Power in the Nuclear Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Robert E. Osgood and Robert W. Tucker, *Force, Order and Justice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967); George Quester, *Nuclear Diplomacy* (New York: Dunellen, 1970); Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973); Alexander George, et al., *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); and Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

rather than how to wage it, becomes an extremely important strategic concern. This has led some to adopt the view that as long as both the Soviet Union and the United States have the capability to wreak "unacceptable" damage on the other, no matter who strikes first, then peace will be preserved and additional weapons really serve no useful purpose. While such weapons may, by a variety of calculations, seem to make one side superior to the other, such superiority is meaningless. Regardless of the provability of such an argument, it certainly complicates the problem of assessing the meaning of strategic superiority (as do some of the other considerations arising out of the development of nuclear weapons), because we appear to be assessing the significance of an achievement that, by traditional standards, has at best questionable value.

In addition, any determination of the significance of Soviet strategic superiority somehow has to analyze the effects of a total unprecedented phenomenon--prospective Soviet strategic nuclear superiority over the United States. One can argue that at least the prospect of such superiority might have been confronted before--for example, in the days of the famous missile gap. And one could debate as well the question of whether such superiority has already been achieved or is merely likely, barring serious remedial action by the United States.<sup>9</sup> The essential point, however, is that Soviet achievement of strategic nuclear superiority over the United States would be novel.

Therefore, any serious investigation of the significance of Soviet strategic superiority must acknowledge the fact that in several basic respects the problem is unprecedented, and therefore the analyst cannot readily use the behavior of states

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<sup>9</sup>For convenience, we will assume throughout this paper that such superiority has not yet been achieved.



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Strategic analysts have been grappling for most of the period since World War II with the new issues raised by the fact that the immense destructiveness of nuclear weapons challenges traditional premises on the practicality of using force to achieve state goals.<sup>8</sup> One of the results of nuclear destructiveness is that the question of how to avoid war,

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<sup>8</sup>This is not the place to give an extensive bibliography of the strategic literature dealing with this phenomenon, since the topic has been a thread if not a dominant theme in almost all Western writings on strategy in the nuclear age. For a small but enlightening sample see Bernard Brodie, et al., *The Absolute Weapon* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946); Henry Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1957); Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Klaus Knorr, *On the Uses of Military Power in the Nuclear Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Robert E. Osgood and Robert W. Tucker, *Force, Order and Justice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967); George Quester, *Nuclear Diplomacy* (New York: Dunellen, 1970); Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973); Alexander George, et al., *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); and Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

in the prenuclear era for appropriate guidance.<sup>10</sup> It also means that one cannot simply extrapolate from post World War II American or Soviet action to determine the meaning of an "advantage" that the U.S.S.R. has never before possessed.

#### D. INITIAL OVERVIEW: AN ELUSIVE PROBLEM

The above examination of some of the more general considerations involved in analyzing the issue of Soviet strategic superiority serves to emphasize the complexity of the problem and has revealed some particular pitfalls. Because Soviet strategic superiority is a phenomenon unprecedented in the nuclear age, the historical record can be used to estimate the effect of such superiority on Soviet behavior only with great care. As the Soviets may well bring peculiarly Soviet values to their consideration of superiority, "universal" notions of superiority and its consequences (articulated in Western strategic thinking and based on the American experience) should also

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<sup>10</sup>The word to be stressed here is readily. It would clearly be silly to argue that the prenuclear past should be ignored. Indeed, some particular concerns and considerations that have preoccupied us since the dawn of the nuclear age could beneficially be viewed in broader perspective to help avoid making a fetish out of the capabilities and characteristics of strategic nuclear arms. Some current strategic thinkers (like Colin Gray, for example) are appropriately urging more attention to prenuclear theorizing. A particularly insightful parallel to some of our current strategic discontents can be found in Leonard Wainstein, *The Preservation and Employment of a Critical Military Force: A Case History of the British Grand Fleet From 1900 to 1916*, SRI Project No. 4106 (Menlo Park, Calif.: Stanford Research Institute, July 1962). The study contains one of the more colorful articulations of the concept of deterrence (albeit an articulation that would not necessarily be regarded as conducive to deterrence stability nowadays). In the words of the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir John Fisher (in 1904), "My sole objective is PEACE in doing all this! Because if you rub it in both at home and abroad that you are ready for instant war with every unit of your strength in the first line and intend to be 'first in' and hit your enemy in the belly and kick him when he's down and boil your prisoners in oil (if you take any!) and torture his women and children, then people will keep clear of you." (p. 33)



be treated warily. And since the development of the capabilities in the evolving Soviet strategic arsenal can be explained in various ways, such capabilities should be regarded as at best only a starting point for the analyst trying to establish conscious Soviet intent to acquire and exploit strategic superiority. It is therefore not surprising that notwithstanding the importance of the issue, Soviet strategic superiority is not easily subjected to the kind of scrutiny it deserves.

## II

### THE MISSING POLITICAL DIMENSION

Before utilizing the guidelines derived in Chapter I to set the analytic course for future investigations into the effects of Soviet strategic superiority, it is appropriate to survey some of the current commentary to point up the aspect of the problem that most needs attention. On the whole, it is the possible foreign policy utility of Soviet strategic superiority that has suffered the greatest analytical neglect. Notwithstanding the view held by many commentators that it is in terms of foreign policy payoff that the most likely and immediate adverse consequences of Soviet superiority will be felt in the West, this facet of the problem has thus far received scant or, at best, highly abstract and truncated treatment.

#### A. KISSINGER VS. SCHLESINGER

Such recent informed debate as there has been on the significance of Soviet strategic superiority was joined early on by two Western strategists with impeccable credentials--Henry Kissinger and James Schlesinger. Whether by design or largely because of the intellectual intractability of the problem, these two policymakers were remarkably restrained in expressing their views of the foreign policy significance of Soviet strategic superiority.

R. J. Vincent, writing in 1975, has aptly characterized the positions of the two principals as follows:

On the one hand, Dr. Kissinger professes (in Moscow) not to know what strategic superiority is, nor to understand its significance, nor to be able to imagine what to do with it. On the

other hand, Dr. Schlesinger is prepared to attempt a measurement of strategic advantage, stresses the psychological importance of numbers of strategic weapons and of the image of power which third parties form from them (and therefore the possible diplomatic leverage to be gained from them), and seeks to make his belief in the doctrine of "symmetry" or "essential equivalence" operational in a programme designed to increase the strategic options available to the United States. These are early contributions to the debate. Kissinger has not progressed far beyond the assertion that increases in certain categories of military power do not necessarily increase political strength and the hypothesis that "when two nations are already capable of destroying each other, an upper limit exists beyond which additional weapons lose their political significance." Schlesinger has yet to spell out precisely the relationship between strategic power and political influence.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, the less exalted spokesmen who have joined the debate since then have not really addressed the matter of foreign policy significance very effectively either. That deficiency may be partly due to the simple fact that other elements of the problem have seemed to be both more important and

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<sup>1</sup>R. J. Vincent, *Military Power and Political Influence: The Soviet Union and Western Europe*, Adelphi Paper No. 119 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1975), pp. 2-3.

For perhaps the best exposition by Dr. Schlesinger of his views on the political significance of the Soviet Union's growing strategic nuclear capability see Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, *Testimony before U.S. Congress, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Law and Organization*, 93d Cong., 2d sess., March-April 1974, especially p. 197. Laurence Martin was among the first to note that beyond making general assertions that Soviet strategic advances could have a political impact--particularly in Europe--the Secretary did not really go very far toward making the case. See "Changes in American Strategic Doctrine--An Initial Interpretation," *Survival* 16(4). For then Secretary of State Kissinger's principal statement of his skepticism regarding the foreign policy significance of strategic superiority see the report on his Moscow press conference in *The New York Times*, July 4, 1974.



more tractable. Hence, much of the commentary has focused on relatively calculable items, such as the hard target kill capabilities of the evolving Soviet missile arsenal or the protection afforded by Soviet civil defense measures, with an occasional flat statement that (depending on the particular commentator's point of view) these would or would not matter sufficiently in military terms to have a foreign policy payoff.<sup>2</sup>

## B. OF WINNABLE NUCLEAR WARS AND LIMITED NUCLEAR OPTIONS

This lack of systematic attention to the foreign policy significance of Soviet strategic superiority may also be attributed in part to the attention paid to more immediate concerns--concerns that helped raise the specter of strategic superiority in the first place. The possible threat to the survivability of the ICBM component of the U.S. strategic triad that is posed by the qualitative and quantitative advances in the evolving Soviet strategic arsenal has been a matter of paramount interest in Western defense circles in recent years. Attempts to identify the motivations behind these advances have excited interest in a number of related, but nevertheless analytically discrete problems, of which two in particular are of note--the postulated Soviet beliefs that a nuclear war can be won or that a limited nuclear war is exploitable.

### 1. Winning an All-Out Nuclear War

No responsible commentator has gone so far as to equate the threat posed to the ICBM component of the U.S. strategic triad with a Soviet capability to launch a disarming first strike

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<sup>2</sup>The articles by Paul Nitze and Jan Lodal that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in 1976 represent the best example of a straightforward debate in these terms. See Paul H. Nitze, "Assuring Strategic Stability in an Era of Détente," *Foreign Affairs* 54(2) and Jan M. Lodal "Assuring Strategic Stability: An Alternative View," *Foreign Affairs* 54(3).

against the United States (the ultimate horror of horrors according to classic Western nuclear deterrence notions). But it has been suggested that a vulnerable U.S. ICBM force, coupled with a Soviet arsenal that could knock out the U.S. ICBM's with plenty to spare, and a "reasonably effective" Soviet civil defense program, could tempt the U.S.S.R. to exploit the advantages of superiority in some future crisis by striking first.

Without implying that the Soviets are simply waiting until the calculus of advantage reaches the right number to embark on a central nuclear war, some commentators have also concluded that the Soviets may believe that, under the circumstances, a central nuclear war with the United States is not necessarily to be avoided at all costs. Thus, if the Soviets believed that even an all-out nuclear war were winnable, it would make sense for them to attain and exploit strategic superiority. Much time has therefore been devoted to attempting to show that the Soviets, unlike many Western strategists, do maintain this belief.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Exploiting a Limited War

This point of view is at least consistent with repeated Soviet avowals that a central nuclear war with the United States would be a total war. Such is not the case, however, with a related point of view, which is reflected most prominently in the so-called Schlesinger doctrine. This view is essentially that the capabilities of superiority would enable the Soviets to strike all or some significant portion of the U.S. ICBM force in order to obtain political gains from a United States unwilling to retaliate against the Soviet Union for such a strike, since retaliation would then lead to the destruction of U.S. cities. Thus, evolution of the Soviet strategic arsenal has raised the possibility that the U.S.S.R.

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<sup>3</sup>Perhaps the most widely circulated exposition of this point of view is Richard Pipes, "Why the Soviet Union Thinks It Could Fight and Win a Nuclear War," *Commentary* 64(1).



might well consider the exercise of some kind of limited nuclear option simply because it was acquiring the appropriate capabilities. Indeed, while the Minuteman vulnerability problem has been around for some time, postulation of a Soviet LNO seems to underpin most current consideration of it.

Certain aspects of the situation have given rise to much controversy over various issues: the effectiveness of Soviet civil defense measures and the consequent Soviet confidence that damage from U.S. retaliation could be limited; the possibility that efforts to enhance U.S. limited nuclear options would prompt (rather than deter) serious Soviet contemplation of a limited nuclear option strategy and thus lower the nuclear threshold; the appropriateness of Secretary Schlesinger's emphasis on enhancing U.S. options at the low end of the strike spectrum to meet a Soviet challenge that, if even minimally consistent with long-standing Soviet targeting predilections, would most likely take the "limited" form of fairly massive counterforce strikes.<sup>4</sup> These and other contentious issues have been raised in connection both with the Soviet belief in the winnability of an all-out central nuclear war and the Soviet consideration of a limited nuclear options strategy.

As important as these issues may be, however, their effect is to constrain our consideration of the political problem. These two concerns, both prompted by the evolving Soviet strategic threat, have distorted our comprehension of how strategic nuclear weapons can have utility in terms of foreign

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<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of the significance of--and some of the problems raised by--consideration of limited nuclear options by the United States, see Lynn Etheridge Davis, *Limited Nuclear Options: Deterrence and the New American Doctrine*, Adelphi Paper No. 121 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1976); for a comparative analysis of U.S. and Soviet positions on limited nuclear options, see Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Selective Nuclear Options in American and Soviet Strategic Policy*, R-2034-DDRE (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, 1976); for a more detailed view of factors affecting Soviet perspectives on limited nuclear options, see Karl F. Spielmann, *Prospects for a Soviet Strategy of Controlled Nuclear War: An Assessment of Some Key Indicators*, IDA Paper P-1236.

policy. Indeed, these concerns have acted as a prism, so focusing any considerations of the phenomenon of Soviet strategic superiority that the "political" has been subsumed into the "military."

### 3. The Political "Militarized"

With regard to the Soviet belief in the winnability of an all-out nuclear war, the possible foreign policy gains of superiority have been defined basically in terms of the policy goals that the Soviets might achieve through waging (or threatening) such a war. The notion that the Soviets believe that while nuclear weapons are terribly destructive they can, like conventional weapons, be utilized rationally to serve the goals of the state has been particularly emphasized. And the Soviet Union is of course presumed to have goals of such surpassing import that under the right circumstances the political benefits of a nuclear war would outweigh the costs of wielding the nuclear instrument. Clausewitz, the supreme articulator of the notion that force must be subordinated to political purpose, is frequently invoked to lend the appropriate patina of authority to these observations. His work is cited to show that such Soviet views, while not in keeping with certain modern Western strategic notions, are congruent with his deeper and more durable wisdom.

Whatever real and important dangers might ensue should the Soviets hold these views, this approach is far too narrow to use to consider the foreign policy element of Soviet strategic superiority. Attention is diverted, however justifiably, from such political considerations as what foreign policy utility the Soviets may perceive in simply being seen to possess strategic superiority<sup>5</sup>; the possibility of using nonmilitary

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<sup>5</sup>This is not to say that attention is totally diverted from this consideration, since it can be (and is sometimes) argued that political payoffs can ensue from the Soviets being perceived to believe that they could actually win a central nuclear war. But that argument still hinges on the (continued on next page)

(or at least nonstrategic nuclear) means to achieve the ends that nuclear war could serve; the relative importance of such means, in comparison to the mere possession of a perceived strategic superiority, in the Soviets' calculus of how best to pursue their political goals; and, indeed, an examination of what these goals really are, how they may have changed over time or differ from place to place, and so on.

The hypothetical Soviet interest in limited nuclear options has also biased our consideration of the foreign policy ramifications of Soviet strategic superiority. In the words of one student of current strategic thinking:

...Strategic thinking in the present day seems to have turned full circle to the operational phase: that is, to the study of the narrow application of military force for military purposes. American strategic thinking is now absorbed by determinations of hard target counterforce capabilities, exchange models and limited nuclear war scenarios.<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, Secretary Schlesinger and others have asserted that it is not necessary actually to carry out a limited nuclear strike in order to achieve the desired foreign policy result--perception of one's capability to exercise such strikes is sometimes all that is required. Such perception is part of what

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(cont'd) connection between Soviet political goals and the use of nuclear weapons to achieve them. The key implication of the argument with regard to peacetime political impact is, of course, that the U.S.S.R. would be willing to resort to nuclear weapons. This rests on the argument that not only will the U.S.S.R. possess the capabilities necessary to consolidate their wartime achievements but that the U.S.S.R. values additional achievements sufficiently to believe that attaining them would be worth whatever losses may be incurred and thus constitute a meaningful "win." These are considerations that tend to predispose one to focus on such things as calculations of comparative damage in the event of a central nuclear conflict and rather abstract discussions of the "ultimate" goals that the Soviets might see such a conflict accomplishing.

<sup>6</sup>Michael D. Salomon, "New Concepts for Strategic Parity," *Survival* (19)6, p. 255.



determines the credibility factor, which has linked the possession of nuclear weapons (even presumably unusable ones) to foreign policy influence since the onset of postwar strategic theorizing. However, even explicit treatment of the credibility factor has more or less concluded only that changes in the strategic options available to the United States and the U.S.S.R. (and other countries' perceptions of these changes) will affect estimates of superpower credibility and hence somehow be meaningful in foreign policy terms. While this may be true--alterations in strategic capabilities may indeed be the significant element affecting how credible allies and adversaries alike find one's threats or commitments--it is all the same highly abstract. Other factors can also affect credibility in particular contexts (be they other military elements, such as conventional force deployments, or nonmilitary elements) and, in this particular case, it is possible that the Soviets have a unique perspective on such matters.

#### 4. "Mirror-Imaging" the Political-Military Connection

To the extent that the political significance of Soviet strategic superiority has been defined through discussion of the theoretical Soviet belief in the winnability of a nuclear war and the limited nuclear options issue it has been affected by certain long-standing Western conceptual biases regarding the connection between political influence and strategic nuclear weapons. Defining the utility of strategic arms in terms of their estimated value in achieving certain policy aims when employed militarily is quite possibly a more Western than Soviet interpretation of the relationship between politics and strategic weapons.<sup>7</sup> A belief in the winnability of a nuclear

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<sup>7</sup>Since estimating the Soviet appreciation of the political utility of strategic nuclear weapons (and specifically the political utility of "superiority" in such weapons) constitutes the focus of this study as a whole, it is inappropriate to try to present the Soviet reading at this (continued on next page)

war may be thought of as particularly Soviet; it does run counter to certain Western notions that the consequences of using nuclear weapons are so horrible that the weapons are not to be employed to serve political purposes. But in arguing thus, one is still operating within a frame of reference that links the political value of nuclear weapons closely with their actual employment militarily.

The limited nuclear options issue reflects this same bias, although perhaps more subtly. Such options may appear to merit serious consideration (as a threat to be faced or a desirable course of action for the United States to pursue), but they rest on the assumption that if appropriate refinements are made, nuclear weapons can effectively serve political purposes. The refinements in question are considered appropriate insofar as

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(cont'd) point in our discussion. For the present it is sufficient to note that there is much to indicate that the Soviet view on the relationship between nuclear means and political ends is more complex and subtle than the apparent Soviet effort simply to update Clausewitz would suggest. Without assuming that the Soviets cannot become ensnared in inconsistencies of their own, one must, for example, try to explain such assertions as the following (which, if one were to adhere to the notion that the political utility of nuclear weapons is largely determined by their military application, would seem flatly contradictory):

...The ideologues of imperialism are attempting to torpedo Marxist-Leninist theses which reveal the link between politics and war, to belittle their cognitive value for the "nuclear age." They declare that the new weapon has radically and fundamentally altered the relationship between politics and war.... (p. 47)

The "rationalization" of nuclear war, as it is conceived by bourgeois military theorists, aims at giving the military a free hand. Declaring war to be a "rational instrument of policy," imperialist ideologues are attempting to legitimize it. (p. 75)

Maj. Gen. A. S. Milovidov and Col. V. G. Kozlov, eds., *The Philosophical Heritage of V. I. Lenin and Problems of Contemporary War* (Moscow, 1972), USAF translation.

they make actual employment of nuclear weapons more feasible--and the threat to use them hence more believable--in a variety of situations.

In this respect, limited nuclear options considerations appear to solve a key problem inherent in the argument that the Soviets may believe seriously in the winnability of a central nuclear war. For that belief to be a matter of credible concern to Western policymakers (in the sense that it would have an effect on Soviet attitudes toward initiating a central nuclear war rather than simply boosting Soviet morale or guiding Soviet actions once such a war is underway), it is necessary to assume Soviet goals of surpassing import. Otherwise, it is difficult to conceive of a situation in which the Soviets could trade off the destructive effects of nuclear weapons (civil defense measures and a knock-out blow against U.S. ICBM's notwithstanding) against the political ends to be served. To justify the use of nuclear weapons, such goals would have to be perceived by the Soviets as (a) extremely important intrinsically; and (b) unachievable by other means.<sup>8</sup> In short, the limited nuclear options issue appears to solve the problem inherent to nuclear weapons of positing a believable commensurability of means and ends. But it is still the use or threatened use of the weapons that is the main focus of any consideration of their political utility.

Limited nuclear options considerations have from time to time appeared to Western policymakers to be an attractive way out of some very serious nuclear age constraints. This may have been because of Western strategic concepts, which underlined (and possibly even overstressed) the effects of nuclear weapons as so horrible that the weapons could not rationally

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<sup>8</sup>A useful discussion of possible Soviet perspectives on the utility of nonmilitary (and especially nonnuclear) means to accomplish whatever large long-term goals the Soviets may hold for Europe can be found in Richard Rosecrance, *Strategic Deterrence Reconsidered*, Adelphi Paper No. 116 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1975).



be used militarily to accomplish political goals. It may also have been because of the frustrations engendered by U.S. inability to translate strategic nuclear superiority over the U.S.S.R. into significant political payoffs (besides, of course, the prevention of major war between the United States and the Soviet Union). Whatever their ultimate utility in enhancing the credibility of the U.S. deterrent, however, they are at bottom a military answer to a political problem rather than a political answer to a political problem. These considerations do not answer the question of how to maximize the political impact of nuclear weapons given their horrible consequences if actually employed. Rather, the focus is on refining--and limiting--the uses of nuclear weapons so that they can serve militarily in the cause of political goals less momentous than the survival of American society. To say that political payoffs may ensue even if nuclear weapons are not actually put to limited use does not deny the basically military thrust of these considerations--that fine-tuning one's strategic nuclear capabilities can affect the behavior of enemies (and allies) in peacetime in ways that the mere possession of tremendous destructive power that can be visited on these enemies would not.

### C. THE MISSING DIMENSION OF THE PROBLEM

#### 1. Analytical Priorities and Biases

Assessing the significance of Soviet strategic superiority would not be easy under the best of conditions, and thus it is not suprising that any systematic consideration of the foreign policy significance of such superiority has so far largely been unattempted. For while the foreign policy payoff may be where the practical effects of Soviet strategic superiority would most readily be felt, delineating the relationship between possession of strategic nuclear arms and efforts to shape the international environment without actually using these arms--and,

in particular, determining how the Soviets conceive of that relationship--is difficult.

Other factors have also tended to inhibit attempts to evaluate the foreign policy utility of Soviet strategic superiority or conceal the need for such an evaluation. It does make sense, after all, for analysts to concentrate initially on the characteristics and evolution of Soviet strategic weapons, if only to determine whether there is some meaningful basis for concern. And it also makes sense to focus at first on the potentially momentous military consequences of certain strategic force asymmetries between the United States and the U.S.S.R. that could be construed as constituting some kind of Soviet strategic superiority. However, these are not by any means the only elements of the problem caused by the Soviet strategic buildup that can or should be evaluated, and such analysis does not significantly advance our understanding of the political uses of strategic superiority.

The attention given to the issues of the winnability of a central nuclear war or the use of limited nuclear options is also understandable as a reaction to the fact that the evolving Soviet strategic arsenal appears to pose a particular threat to the U.S. ICBM force. And since discussion of both issues has made much of the relationship between strategic nuclear arms and policy goals, it is tempting to assume that we need not analyze that relationship further. However, the relationship as specified in discussion of these issues ignores or discounts several foreign policy considerations which the Soviets may well judge to be important, as it seems to be shaped mainly by peculiarly Western concepts and experiences.

Even the implications of the postulated Soviet belief in the winnability of a central nuclear war depend on Western concepts. Such a belief certainly represents a significant departure from the common Western assumption, indicated by Secretary Kissinger's remarks, that "when two nations are already capable of destroying

each other, an upper limit exists beyond which additional weapons lose their political significance." The presumably uniquely Soviet retort to this would be: "Not if those additional weapons permit you to be less totally destroyed than your enemy, enabling you to claim victory even after a nuclear holocaust, they don't." However, this belief still depends on the Western idea that basically it is the feasibility of using strategic nuclear weapons that defines their political value. A truly unique Soviet position might be that additional nuclear weapons can have political utility irrespective of (or at least not directly because of) their potential destructiveness in the event of central nuclear war.

Discussion of the limited nuclear options issue has imparted what seems to be an even more obviously Western coloration to analysis of the political value of strategic arms. As mentioned, the presumed effectiveness of limited nuclear options depends on the same relationship between military applicability and political payoff that underlies the postulated Soviet belief in the winnability of nuclear war. But perhaps more significant is the fact that the issue has been discussed entirely with reference to Western limited nuclear options notions. From articulation of the McNamara doctrine to the Schlesinger doctrine, such Soviet discussion of the issue as has appeared has been commentary on Western concepts of limited war and on the whole has been strongly negative. There has been no publicly avowed Soviet limited nuclear options concept.

The way in which Western analysts have considered these two issues has thus had some subtle, but nonetheless counter-productive effects. The Western biases with which the relationship between political utility and strategic nuclear arms is viewed may easily cause the analyst to overlook, or simply ignore, some of the truly relevant political concerns that underlie Soviet pronouncements on the topic. And it would



appear that we have particularly misread the Soviet discussions of limited nuclear options.

These considerations do not seem merely to be isolated problem areas. Rather, they point to a broader deficiency, of which only brief mention can be made in this paper. On the whole, despite much useful and admirable work over the years by students of the Soviet military scene, we have not effectively determined the Soviet views of deterrence and, relatedly, the degree of compatibility between those views and Western--especially American--deterrence concepts. Much of our consideration of these matters has tended to be confined to two polar positions.

These positions are characterized by two arguments: on the one hand that the Soviets subscribe to American notions of mutual assured destruction (MAD), and on the other that U.S. and Soviet strategic perspectives are starkly at odds. In the latter case, the United States is often portrayed as having an overweening concern for deterrence per se and a consequent willingness to sacrifice war-fighting needs on the altar of maintaining deterrence stability.<sup>9</sup> This outlook is contrasted to a Soviet preoccupation with meeting war-fighting requirements,

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<sup>9</sup>Deterrence stability comprises a number of related elements, with crisis stability and arms race stability usually treated as the two main subsets. The former has to do with avoiding those actions, particularly in weapons deployments, which would lead the enemy to believe he was in a situation of "unacceptable" risk, thus tempting him to strike first, especially during a crisis. The latter involves avoiding those actions which would "unnecessarily" escalate the arms race by prompting the enemy to respond with more, or more threatening, arms programs. This process could in turn eventually create the unacceptable risks that would undermine crisis stability. It should be noted, however, that too much restraint (avoiding deployments necessary to remedy weaknesses that could tempt the enemy to strike) represents an important consideration as well.

a preoccupation based on an apparent conviction that deterrence is in any event too fragile to permit serious neglect of those provisions needed to cope with the consequences of a breakdown of deterrence.<sup>10</sup> Making such provisions is presumably regarded as at the least not seriously contributing to this breakdown.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>This in turn leads to a key question: whether one can cope sufficiently with the breakdown of deterrence to emerge from a nuclear conflict with a meaningful "win." (It is not necessarily true that one must have confidence in that prospect to provide what is necessary for fighting a nuclear war, limiting damage, and so on, if deterrence does break down. Clearly, however, the extent to which such confidence exists could crucially affect the Soviet perspective on risk-taking.) Noting that the Soviets are concerned with fighting a nuclear war only raises this question; it does not answer it. To answer it, it would appear to be necessary to start with some reasonable evaluations of what the Soviets would regard as a meaningful win. Assessments might then proceed to determine whether the Soviets desire, and think they can achieve, strategic superiority for war-fighting or war winning purposes.

<sup>11</sup>This in turn leads to another key question: whether from a Soviet perspective there are significant incompatibilities between deterrence and war-fighting needs. From a MAD standpoint, certain Soviet weapons efforts, and particularly the stress on capabilities that place the U.S. ICBM force in jeopardy, seem quite at odds with a concern to keep deterrence from breaking down. These efforts have therefore become for many Western analysts an important indication that the Soviets do not subscribe to a MAD doctrine. But whether this is the case and whether, even if it is the case, it denotes a cavalier Soviet attitude toward the possibility that deterrence could break down is far from clear. Determining what the West should worry about requires a careful look at the many sides of this issue. Even if one accepts the premises of a serious Soviet war-fighting concern, there are nevertheless several possible explanations which singly or in some combination could account for an apparent Soviet indifference to the impact of their deployments on deterrence stability. The Soviets may, for example, believe that the stability (or fragility) of deterrence is mostly a function of the broader political-ideological relationship between the U.S.S.R. and the United States and, hence, is not likely to be radically affected by specific deployments. They may simply be insensitive to the degree of Western concern caused by their deployments. They may misperceive this concern, (continued on next page)

This is not the place to try to evaluate the comparative merits of these two conceptions of Soviet strategic perspectives. Of late there have been some important efforts to argue both cases in relatively sophisticated and convincing terms.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, understandable data problems notwithstanding, there is a vivid contrast between the treatment accorded Soviet and U.S. deterrence problems. There has been

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(cont'd) regarding it mostly as a means to deprive the U.S.S.R. of deployments it views as necessary to meet legitimate deterrence needs. They may be acutely sensitive to the Western concern but seek to defuse it not by deployments restraint, but by diplomatic--and particularly arms control--maneuvers. (This may be an especially attractive explanation, particularly if we believe it is hard for them to curb the institutional momentum behind various weapons programs.) They may be sensitive to Western concern, but regard this concern as, on the whole, salutary, helping to shake U.S. and Western confidence and thus enabling the U.S.S.R. to deter and even intimidate these enemies more easily. Finally, the Soviets may believe that meeting war-fighting needs is so important in any event as to be worth some risk of disturbing deterrence stability. (And confidence in meeting war-winning needs would obviously strengthen this belief.)

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Garthoff argues that the Soviets have come a long way toward subscribing to mutual deterrence propositions in his "Mutual Deterrence and Strategic Arms Limitation in Soviet Policy," *International Security* 3(1). Dennis Ross has perhaps argued most effectively that the Soviets subscribe to the distinctive deterrence concept of denial of military advantage (rather than the concept of deterrence by punishment which underlies MAD), and that this is on the whole quite compatible with also providing for war-fighting should deterrence fail. See Ross, *Rethinking Soviet Strategic Policy: Inputs and Implications*, ACIS Working Paper No. 5, Center for Arms Control and International Security (Los Angeles: University of California, 1977). The possibility should also be considered that the Soviets have in fact sought to combine MAD and war-fighting notions--even though one of these notions may be dominant and the combination on the whole may be somewhat untidy. A dual perspective, containing both "punishment" and "advantage-denial" assumptions, is evident, for example, in the following quotation from Marshal Krylov, former CINC of the Strategic Rocket Forces: "Under contemporary circumstances ... an attempt by an aggressor to inflict a surprise preemptive strike cannot give him a decisive advantage for the achievement of victory in war, and moreover will not save him from great destruction and human losses." See Garthoff, "Mutual Deterrence," p. 127.



very little effort to subject the Soviet deterrence problem to the kind of sophisticated and systematic analysis that the U.S. deterrence problem has received. We have, for the most part, contented ourselves with glosses on Soviet military writings, surveying Soviet strategic programs, and noting rather superficially cases in which Soviet thoughts and actions apparently did or did not accord with Western strategic principles.

It may be true, of course, that the Soviet strategic perspective is so simple that efforts to emulate the kinds of analyses that the U.S. deterrence problem has received are not appropriate. At least three key questions must be systematically addressed, however, if we are to improve our comprehension of the Soviet strategic perspective significantly. First, are there, at least implicitly, different levels or types of deterrence needs that the Soviets have sought to meet, in addition to deterrence of an attack on the Soviet homeland? Second, how do the Soviets view both the role of their strategic nuclear capability in meeting those needs and the relationship of that role to the roles played by other forces? Third, to what extent is the provision of capabilities for war-fighting viewed as compatible with the provision for various types or levels of deterrence? Although students of the Soviet military scene have touched on these questions, much more work can and should be done.

As noted, what may be called the MAD and the war-fighting schools of thought have determined the terms of reference for the ongoing Western debate on the Soviet strategic perspective. In part the acceptability of those terms of reference may stem from a fixation that both schools share, that the Soviet homeland is the exclusive reference point for evaluating what the Soviets regard as their "legitimate" deterrence needs. To be sure, the Soviet homeland is undoubtedly the most important reference point for Soviet strategists and planners. However, while the fact that Soviet deterrence requirements encompass

the defense of the U.S.S.R.'s East European allies as well has been mentioned, there has been little effort to investigate what, if any, discrete impact the defense of these allies may have had on the Soviet definition of their deterrence problem over the years. Still less has there been any serious treatment of Soviet thinking on what it would mean to extend deterrence protection to include quasi-allies, such as Cuba, North Korea, and North Vietnam, or, even more remotely, to various so-called national liberation groups, once in power.

The relative lack of attention to these issues is particularly anomalous in light of the almost obsessive concern exhibited over the years with extended deterrence problems on the U.S. side. Since many of our conclusions about the uses of strategic superiority were formed in an environment in which the United States was grappling with just these extended deterrence problems, it seems highly appropriate that we should devote more deliberate attention to an investigation of the extended deterrence dimension of the Soviet strategic perspective before we assess the value to the Soviets of acquiring strategic superiority for themselves. This is not to suggest that it would be possible or desirable to apply Western extended deterrence notions to the Soviets. Soviet consideration of the extended deterrence problem might well be completely different. For one thing, their military writings do not define very fully the basic tasks of the overall Soviet military capability--usually mentioned are defense of the motherland, guarding the Socialist community, creating favorable external conditions for the building of communism in the U.S.S.R., and even rendering support in strengthening the defense of the U.S.S.R.'s friends in the Third World.<sup>13</sup> In addition,

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<sup>13</sup>A useful recent statement can be found in General-Major S. Tyushkevitch, "The Armed Forces of the State of the Whole People," *Communist of the Armed Forces*, No. 11 (1978), pp. 10-11.

the Soviets have no published body of analytical literature on the role of strategic power in crisis diplomacy in any way comparable to ours.... Indeed, it may well be that in attempting to divine tacit Soviet concepts for using strategic threats in crisis management, we may be looking for a philosophy that simply doesn't exist in any systematic form.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that only occasionally does one find in Soviet literature any direct hint concerning the relative value of using strategic power vis-à-vis other kinds of military power to performing "extended deterrence" tasks and the degree of compatibility between strategic deterrence and war-fighting needs. The following remarks represent the best available example from Soviet writings. With regard to the first point, they express an appreciation of the limited utility of strategic nuclear power and the consequent importance of other military means.

At the present time the principle means for restraining imperialist aggressions in all regions of the world is the ability of the USSR to deliver nuclear missile weapons to any point on the earth's surface.... However, this form will not always be effective in those situations that could develop into limited wars, even though the interests of the Soviet Union and other Socialist Bloc countries may be involved ... in connection with the task of preventing local wars ... the Soviet Union may require mobile and well trained and well-equipped armed forces.... It is precisely this type of role that ships of the Soviet Navy are playing in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>15</sup>

On the second point, the description of U.S. strategic programs offers some evidence of Soviet appreciation

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<sup>14</sup>Benjamin S. Lambeth, *The Political Potential of Equivalence: The View from Moscow and Europe*, RAND P-6167 (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, 1978), pp. 15-16.

<sup>15</sup>V. M. Kulish, et al., *Military Force and International Relations* (Moscow, 1972), trans. by Joint Publications Research Service, p. 103.



that strategic superiority may be worth seeking for the advantages it might offer if nuclear war should occur. At the same time, such superiority may not translate into commensurate peacetime payoffs, at least in facilitating any direct exploitation.

...One must not exclude the possibility that, from a military-strategic standpoint, the military programs produced in the USA could produce certain partial advantages. But an attempt to realize such advantages from an international-political standpoint could be not only risky but dangerous to the entire world and particularly to that side that initiated such realization.<sup>16</sup>

As these examples illustrate, there are some available points of departure for serious consideration of the Soviet extended deterrence problem, even though the way the Soviets treat the problem may be unique and even though one's analysis may have to go well beyond Soviet military writings. For present purposes the basic message is that the topic is extremely important, that it is large and complex in its own right, and that in the absence of such treatment all assessments of the value of strategic superiority will be found wanting.

That the topic has so far been basically lost in the shuffle is, in the final analysis, symptomatic of our own Western biases, perhaps much more than we are aware. We cannot escape this bias

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<sup>16</sup>Note the reference to "that side" rather than to the United States or the imperialist side, suggesting the mutual applicability of these observations. On the whole, this source regards the strategic status which the U.S.S.R. had achieved by the early 1970's as helping stymie U.S. efforts to seek foreign policy gains by flaunting American strategic nuclear might. The implication is that insofar as the "forces of history" can thus move forward with less impediment, a broad political plus is registered for the U.S.S.R. However, the Soviet status is not treated as "superior"; it is not clear that Soviet "superiority" would be much more beneficial for the U.S.S.R.; and the source does not concede that U.S. nuclear blackmail efforts and the like were really very effective, even before the U.S.S.R. attained the strategic status of the early 1970's. Ibid., pp. 100-101.

by arguing, for example, that a mutual assured destruction concept would not make sense to the Soviets because, among other things, their strategic culture has been dominated by a professional military for whom war-fighting, even in the nuclear age, is serious business.<sup>17</sup> We must also take care to be reasonably consistent in our treatment of the implications of those Soviet characteristics seemingly incompatible with belief in the MAD concept. It may be the case, for example, that these characteristics would incline the Soviets to seek a superiority usable for war-waging purposes. At the same time, however, these characteristics may discourage the Soviets from seeking and exploiting superiority in limited nuclear options terms.

Thus, framing our discussion in terms of limited nuclear options we seem bound to miss most of the Soviet strategic superiority problem. There is obviously a temptation to assume that Soviet war-fighting biases and a Soviet inclination toward LNO (especially a massive LNO as postulated in current thinking about the Minuteman vulnerability problem) are compatible in a kind of "worst of all possible worlds" scenario.<sup>18</sup> We would do well to consider, however, that, perhaps as a direct result of our neglect of the Soviet extended deterrence problem, what we have put together is in fact a jerry-built structure. It combines, on the one hand, some plausibly distinctive Soviet defense features with, on the other, a strategic concept created by

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<sup>17</sup>This strategic culture concept is discussed in Jack L. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations*, RAND R-2154-AT (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, 1977).

<sup>18</sup>The assumed compatibility seems to be based on the belief that we reflect the Soviet perspective quite accurately and avoid the mirror-image problem if we simply ascribe to the Soviets attitudes that appear to us to be relatively more threatening. In this regard, we seem to have been much more concerned with determining whether the Soviets really buy MAD than with the possibility that--beyond certain immediate arms control concerns--a MAD-oriented U.S.S.R. might represent, on the whole, a greater rather than lesser danger to the West. Similarly, we have not given very serious consideration to the nature and implications of possible mirror-imaging practiced on the Soviet side of the strategic equation.

Western civilian strategic analysts and heavily shaped by a distinctively American need to buttress the credibility of extended deterrence commitments to major overseas allies.<sup>19</sup> It would therefore seem that focusing on the LNO issue to illuminate what foreign policy payoff strategic superiority will have for the Soviets has particularly hindered the analytic process by obscuring more productive and pertinent lines of inquiry. These will be described in Parts Two and Three.

## 2. Examples from Recent Strategic Literature

In order to complete our survey of what has been done, it is pertinent at this point to examine recent commentary by those Western analysts who have shown their awareness of the need to pay particular attention to the foreign policy considerations inherent in strategic arms issues, or who have manifested a special concern for the dangers that Soviet strategic superiority may pose for the West. The study that perhaps represents the best effort, in terms of giving political factors their proper due, is Walter Slocombe's *The Political Implications of Strategic Parity*.<sup>20</sup> Even here, however, one finds only the

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<sup>19</sup>It should be noted that extended deterrence could conceivably encompass all sorts of expansionist Soviet activities for which strategic superiority might be viewed as having some utility. Lacking a basis for concluding how the Soviets define extended deterrence needs and commitments, our analysis in the following chapters will not specifically seek to structure the discussion in extended deterrence terms.

<sup>20</sup>Walter Slocombe, *The Political Implications of Strategic Parity*, Adelphi Paper No. 77 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1971). Despite the fact that this study was written before the specter of Soviet strategic superiority began to loom very large, and deliberately emphasizes the salience to a definition of parity of mutual vulnerability of the United States and the U.S.S.R. (which "superiority" may not really alter), it remains the best attempt so far to address some of the political subtleties and nuances involved in calculating the foreign policy impact of the evolving Soviet strategic arms capability.



slightest attempt to deal specifically with elements that may affect Soviet calculations on the relationships between political utility and strategic nuclear weapons that are not simply extrapolated from certain commonly held Western notions about the new verities that have come about in the nuclear age, such as the significance of mutual vulnerability.

Also of note is a more recent monograph<sup>21</sup> by another astute commentator on strategic arms issues, Edward Luttwak, who is known both for his deep concern with the dangers that Soviet strategic superiority can pose for the West and for his determined efforts to draw attention to the foreign policy ramifications of strategic (and other) arms. Save for a perceptive but brief discussion of such issues as the need to pay attention to the importance of third-country perceptions of the superpower strategic balance and the need to avoid thinking about the political impact of strategic arms almost exclusively in terms of superpower confrontations and crisis management, the bulk of this study is devoted to relatively more tractable military topics such as evolving strategic force structures, weapons characteristics, escalation scenarios, and the like.

Colin Gray, whose prolific writings on defense issues include a great deal of sober reflection on the dangers posed to the West by the growth of Soviet strategic capabilities, is another analyst who has done much to remind people of the political nature of arms races and the analytical pitfalls inherent in judging the Soviets in American terms. In two recent studies Gray has called particular attention to the political significance of Soviet strategic superiority and especially the threat posed to the ICBM force of the United States. In *The Future of Land-Based Missile Forces*, for example, Gray echoes Luttwak, warning of the danger of taking a narrow approach to such matters and thereby slighting (for example) the foreign policy

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<sup>21</sup>Edward H. Luttwak, *Strategic Power: Military Capabilities and Political Utility*, Washington Paper No. 38 (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1976).

significance of one superpower (especially the U.S.S.R.) being perceived to possess a strategic superiority.<sup>22</sup> Gray also asserts that enhanced Soviet strategic options are important if the Soviet strategic arsenal is to be used to influence U.S. behavior in future crises involving the superpowers.

In "Soviet Rocket Forces: Military Capability, Political Utility," Gray argues that "the Soviet SRF appear to be directed by a political intelligence that has few problems with Kissinger's question" ("What in the name of God is strategic superiority?"). He goes on to maintain that "the Soviet SRF should have political utility in the following ways: They should deter strong moves by the United States in response to a challenge, military action by the United States during a crisis, and escalation of a theater conflict to the intercontinental level."<sup>23</sup>

For all these reminders and strictures, however, Gray's treatment of the relationship between strategic arms and political utility in both of these studies is meager and generalized. His pessimistic conclusions as to the political consequences of Soviet strategic superiority are supported largely by a postulation of how U.S. and Allied attitudes might be affected in various contexts by Soviet possession of such superiority, a postulation of what the Soviets (or anybody, for that matter) could do with it, and a postulation that the Soviets must know what they can do with superiority since they have "clearly" been seeking it. There is nothing wrong with the belief that superior Soviet strategic capabilities are worth worrying about simply as capabilities. However, any argument based solely on such a belief fails to address the key questions concerning Soviet intentions that are part of the problem of assessing the military significance of Soviet

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<sup>22</sup>Colin S. Gray, *The Future of Land-Based Missile Forces*, Adelphi Paper No. 140 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Winter, 1977).

<sup>23</sup>Gray, "Soviet Rocket Forces," pp. 54 and 55.

strategic superiority and a major element in any evaluation of the political significance of such superiority.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Some Testimony on the Problem

A final indication of the inadequate treatment the political significance of Soviet strategic superiority has tended to receive can be seen by examining the transcript of the hearings on United States/Soviet strategic options held by the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Subcommittee on Arms Control, Oceans, and International Environment of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on January 14 and 19 and March 16, 1977.<sup>25</sup>

That the hearings were held under the aegis of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (and not, for example, the Armed Services Committee) would lead one to expect to encounter a particular sensitivity to what Soviet strategic superiority might mean in foreign policy terms. Furthermore, those who were invited to give testimony represent a broad spectrum of

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<sup>24</sup>It should be stressed that Gray has effectively brought out in his writings the fact that the Soviet strategic superiority problem can be very real and troubling for the United States almost apart from Soviet intentions. Whatever the real Soviet intent, the United States could be seriously hamstrung by its own perceptions of the military balance in crisis situations or theater conflicts (e.g., conceding escalation dominance to the Soviets) and must contend as well with the potentially adverse foreign policy consequences of a loss of Allied confidence in the U.S. deterrent, resulting from a perception that the Soviets are "superior." See especially in this regard Colin Gray, "The Strategic Forces Triad," *Foreign Affairs* 56(4). On the European perspective on the evolving strategic balance, see also the incisive discussion by Laurence Martin in the symposium on SALT and U.S. policy, *The Washington Quarterly* 2(1). The above considerations of course do not mean that estimates of Soviet intentions with respect to strategic superiority are largely beside the point. Indeed, they call attention to the need for such estimates to help us and our allies have as accurate a perception of the threat as possible.

<sup>25</sup>U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *United States/Soviet Strategic Options*, 95th Cong., 1st sess., 1977.



expert opinion on the reality and dangers of Soviet strategic superiority and include many who have studied and commented in the past on broader considerations germane to the Soviet-U.S. strategic arms relationship. Nevertheless, there is little evidence in this testimony of any attempt to specify what foreign policy utility strategic superiority might have for the Soviets, nor is there any attempt to analyze it beyond broad generalizations about long-term Soviet goals and flat assumptions about Soviet linkage of those goals with achieving particular levels of strategic arms.

Part of the testimony provides an example of the kind of reasoning that perhaps best typifies analysis of the problem to date. In examining the implications of Soviet strategic superiority, Paul Nitze denies that what is at issue is the danger of a disarming Soviet first strike, arguing that more generalized Soviet aggression is the point at issue. To support the argument he presents the following analysis:

But let's take the time of the Cuban missile crisis. At that time we had meaningful nuclear superiority. There isn't any doubt about the fact that we had a much greater capability against their forces than they against ours. We could have done much greater damage to the Soviet Union than they to us. But we couldn't have avoided very substantial damage to the United States, if the Soviets had decided to attack us; we did not have a class A first-strike capability. But the fact that we could do much more damage to them than they to us did indeed give us courage to face up to the problem at the time of the Cuban missile crisis. Therefore, the fact of superiority is meaningful. All these incorrect assertions that superiority is not meaningful, this is what the debate is about.<sup>26</sup>

The basic implication of Mr. Nitze's remarks seems to be that Soviet strategic superiority would give the Soviets the

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

courage to face us down, just as our superiority once affected our behavior toward them. This is not an implausible line of reasoning as far as it goes, nor is it surprising that the Cuban missile crisis should come to mind as an appropriate example of how strategic nuclear capabilities can translate into foreign policy effect. The crisis was surely the most vivid example in the nuclear era of a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union in which the strategic nuclear balance seemed to play a large and direct role--both in precipitating the Soviet action to emplace M/IRBM's in Cuba in the first place and in determining the outcome of the crisis.

For present purposes it is pertinent to note that Mr. Nitze's case rests on a rather blatant mirror-image. The key argument presented here to militate for American vigilance in the face of the dangers of Soviet strategic superiority apparently rests on two elements: first, an intimation of the effects of strategic superiority on future Soviet behavior that is derived straightforwardly from an evaluation of the past effects of strategic superiority on American behavior, and second, an equation of the degree of courage that superiority may have enabled the U.S. to manifest as a defender in an unanticipated situation with the degree of courage that would embolden the Soviets to inaugurate a situation carrying the risk of a nuclear showdown. Moreover, if we assume, as is likely, that the Soviets will not attain an edge in strategic superiority comparable to what the United States had at the time of the missile crisis, then the conclusion Nitze reaches by examining the missile crisis is really the following: Soviet possession of strategic nuclear capability less superior than the American capability in October 1962 would cause the Soviets to take risks greater than the risk the Americans took at that time.<sup>27</sup> As an

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<sup>27</sup>In evaluating the risk-taking problem it is always prudent to bear in mind that countries may take what turn out to be risky actions because they seriously misjudge the element of risk.

extrapolation from U.S. behavior in the missile crisis, the conclusion does not follow.<sup>28</sup> Nor is it a reasonable deduction from Soviet behavior at the time, since insofar as strategic balances appear to have influenced Soviet actions (the impact of that factor on Soviet motives is not beyond dispute), it was Soviet inferiority in comparison to the United States that caused Soviet action, in a desperate attempt to adjust the balance.

In the final analysis Colin Gray has put his finger on the essential problem with regard to all analyses of the issue when he says:

There is no way of testing the rival propositions on the political meaning of strategic imbalance. One cannot be certain of just how much weight Soviet leaders attach to indices of relative strategic capacity.<sup>29</sup>

The fact that what should be tested is essentially untestable may help explain why astute and concerned students of contemporary strategic issues have given so little attention to the political significance of Soviet strategic superiority. Nevertheless, it is neither necessary nor desirable to take Gray's

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<sup>28</sup>One could also point out that inferences drawn from U.S. behavior in this crisis setting that relate to future Soviet behavior in deliberately choosing to take actions that could result in a crisis ignore certain key decisionmaking differences between crisis and noncrisis situations. Drawing on notions of cognitive dynamics, John Steinbruner and Jack Snyder have emphasized that in the Cuban missile crisis, psychological pressure prompted President Kennedy to view his options non-rationally, to weigh them in such a way as to leave stark either/or choices (whereas in a calmer situation there may be a greater chance of more "rational" decisions, based on a more realistic appraisal of options and of costs and benefits). See John D. Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimensions of Political Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), especially p. 110, and Jack L. Snyder, "Rationality at the Brink: The Role of Cognitive Processes in Failures of Deterrence," *World Politics* 30(3), pp. 353-61.

<sup>29</sup>Gray, *The Future of Land-Based Missile Forces*, p. 6.



cautionary message too literally and decide that as the problem cannot be treated properly, the best alternative is not to treat it at all. Despite the lack of explicit and reasonably detailed support deemed necessary to make judgments of the Soviet perspective on the relationship between strategic arms and political utility, judgments will still be made and will have to be accepted or rejected largely on the basis of intuition and hunch.

PART TWO  
THE HISTORICAL RECORD  
AS A GUIDE

At least three questions are basic to the process of determining what political utility the Soviets associate with strategic superiority. These are: What have the Soviets done in the past? What have they said? How have they gone about making decisions? The last two questions should be applied specifically to Soviet pronouncements on military doctrine and other topics that permit some assessment of Soviet perspectives on the nature and political utility of strategic nuclear weapons, and to Soviet decision-making processes and their bearing on the kinds of considerations likely to shape decisions on the development, production, and deployment of strategic arms. These will be considered in Part Three.

This section of the study examines the historical record to ascertain what guidance, if any, we can obtain from it as to the possible effect of strategic superiority on future Soviet behavior in the international arena. In Chapters III and IV we discuss what the record suggests about the relationship between strategic balances and Soviet foreign policy activities, and Soviet understanding of this relationship.



### III

#### STRATEGIC BALANCES AND SOVIET BEHAVIOR

##### A. SOME GENERAL PROBLEMS IN UTILIZING THE HISTORICAL RECORD

Even in the period of our nuclear monopoly, and then of continued nuclear superiority, we had to cope with Soviet probes in Iran, in Greece and Turkey, in Berlin, in Korea, in Cuba, in Indo-China, and in the Middle East. As our nuclear advantage diminishes, these probes can be expected to increase in importance. It follows, we believe, that our theater forces must be improved.<sup>1</sup>

As this quotation illustrates, the fact that we do not really know the Soviet views on the political utility of strategic superiority does not deter us from making judgments in which some knowledge is intimated. The assertion here is that there is a relationship between Soviet "probing" and the diminution of the U.S. nuclear advantage, if not the Soviet acquisition of strategic superiority. That assertion presumes that the strategic nuclear balance figured in some way in the historical cases cited as a determinant of Soviet behavior and that these cases are thus indications of the kind of behavior one can expect from the Soviets when the United States no longer holds the nuclear high cards.

These cases, however, are not unequivocal. One could cite these same examples to show that what the historical record might offer by way of a lesson to a Soviet decisionmaker (who is, after all, the relevant pupil) would be mainly that the weaker nuclear power can still be very assertive--that, in

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<sup>1</sup>Statement of Eugene V. Rostow, Chairman, Executive Committee, Committee on the Present Danger, to United States Senate, Committee on the Budget, 95th Cong., 2d sess., March 1978, p. 7.

effect, beyond perhaps helping to fend off certain challenges to the status quo, "superiority" might not buy very much foreign policy success.<sup>2</sup>

All of this underscores the inadequacy of predicting future behavior by simply stringing together a number of examples of distasteful past actions and then postulating that such behavior must increase as a result of a "diminished U.S. nuclear advantage." Such an argument at best begs the question of how the future behavior of any state can be divined from the historical record, given the effects of an untidy combination of, as the Soviets would put it, "deterministic" and "voluntaristic" elements.

#### 1. The Soviets as Pupils

When we as Western analysts look to the historical record for guidance in this instance, what we would ideally like to find is some discernible correlation of particular strategic "balances" and particular kinds of Soviet behavior in the international arena. Then presumably we could attain a reasonable idea of the Soviet behavior that would result from a strategic imbalance in the Soviets' favor. The problem, however, is that whatever conclusions a Western observer could draw from correlations of past balances and behavior may also be perfectly obvious to the Soviets. They may then alter their behavior simply as a consequence of using the historical record as a guide to what they should or should not do in the future.

There is really no satisfactory way to avoid this problem. It is therefore important that we recognize it as one of the endemic difficulties of turning historiography to predictive

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<sup>2</sup>This is admittedly the perspective of a Soviet "mirror-imager" and as such may not be an accurate indication of likely Soviet attitudes. But if we can accept the idea that the Soviets might look back on the Cuban case, and be impressed by what the United States could do with its strategic nuclear superiority, why should we assume out of hand that they would be incapable of perceiving what the United States could not do in that case and in others?

uses, and temper our estimates of how reliable even the most thorough knowledge of past Soviet actions is as a guide to future Soviet behavior.

## 2. Reliance on Imperfect Precedents and Analogues

The consideration central to using the historical record as a guide in this case is the fact that Soviet strategic nuclear superiority would be unprecedented. Consequently, all historical cases are inherently suspect. Even assuming that the analyst were capable of isolating the effect of the element of strategic balance on past Soviet actions in the international arena (which is a huge assumption to make), there would still be real problems. The most that one can expect to learn from analysis of past Soviet actions is how the Soviets behaved on occasion as the superior power toward certain other states in the pre-nuclear era, and how they have behaved as an inferior or equal to the United States in the nuclear era. But what we need to know is how they will behave as the superior power to the United States in the nuclear era.

To be sure, after careful study of how Soviet behavior altered as the Soviets moved from one inferiority relationship to another, and from an inferiority relationship to a parity relationship with the United States in the nuclear age, one could venture some surmises as to what the effects of superiority might be. But such surmises would still be an inadequate basis on which to make judgments. For one thing, it would be necessary to calculate the extent to which the effects of past inferiority, which may have motivated the Soviets to take certain risky actions in an attempt to improve their status (most notably the Cuban venture), would be made up for by the hubris of superiority. Since inferiority may have been one of the motivations for earlier Soviet behavior (for example, leading the Soviets to try to convince others that they were not weak), one cannot simply extrapolate from that behavior to project Soviet actions as the superior superpower. In short, the



record of past Soviet behavior in the international arena would offer at best only imperfect precedents for future Soviet actions as affected by the altered strategic balance factor.

It seems useful, therefore, to supplement such an inquiry with analyses that consider appropriate analogues. Is there anything to be learned, for example, from American behavior as the strategic superior to the U.S.S.R. in the postwar era? Does Soviet behavior as the superior power in certain local contexts, such as vis-à-vis Europe or China, offer guidance for Soviet perspectives on the value of attaining strategic superiority over the United States? Obviously, such analyses must be considered with great care. Extrapolations from U.S. behavior, as earlier indicated, carry the risk of mirror-imaging. If the analyst uses Soviet behavior in Europe and in regard to the P.R.C. as a guide, he must be attentive to special considerations that might have affected that behavior, particularly the fact that in both contexts the bilateral strategic relationship with the United States is a variable.

Despite their shortcomings, however, these analyses deserve to be exploited: they do deal directly with the possessor of strategic superiority in contexts in which we have a record of its foreign policy behavior. Such analyses are also valuable because if, in considering the utility of strategic superiority over the United States, Soviet analysts and policymakers seek guidance for their deliberations, they are likely to consider the U.S. experience (especially in Cuba) and the U.S.S.R.'s own experience in dealing with Europe and with the P.R.C. Such analyses thus are imperfect analogues from which to predict future Soviet actions, but they may well influence such actions and for that reason alone deserve attention.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>This crucial problem of how leaders learn from past experiences and what lessons they allow history to teach them is treated incisively in Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

## B. THE CHINESE AND CUBAN ANALOGUES

In the next chapter we will look in some detail at the European analogue. A few features of the Chinese and Cuban analogues are mentioned here simply to indicate what insights they may provide into Soviet deliberations on the value of strategic superiority.

One of the most notable aspects of the China analogue is that the Soviets took steps in the late 1960's which suggested that they were less than satisfied with the utility of their substantial strategic nuclear superiority over the Chinese. In the mid-1960's the U.S.S.R. had a hefty margin of strategic nuclear superiority over the P.R.C., given that the P.R.C. had only exploded its first nuclear device in October 1964.<sup>4</sup> Yet in 1966 the Soviet Union commenced a buildup on the Sino-Soviet border that by the 1970's resulted in a total of 43 divisions being deployed there (in contrast to a prebuildup level of 15 to 17 divisions).<sup>5</sup>

This buildup can be explained in various ways, ranging from assessments that tie it to actual Soviet invasion preparations to analyses that link it to Soviet efforts simply to assure the sanctity of the Sino-Soviet border or to exert a kind of general diplomatic pressure on the P.R.C. Common to all these interpretations, however, is the assumption that the Soviets regarded

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<sup>4</sup>For a basic comparison of the Soviet and Chinese military postures in this period, see *The Military Balance, 1965-1966* (London: The Institute for Strategic Studies, 1965) pp. 2-6 and 8-11.

<sup>5</sup>For a useful survey of Soviet perspectives on China as a military threat see Morris Rothenberg, *Whither China: The View From the Kremlin* (Miami, Fla.: Center for Advanced International Studies, University of Miami, 1977), pp. 89-116. See also the useful insights into the military strengths and weaknesses of the Soviets and Chinese "on the border" in Philip A. Petersen, "Possible Courses of a Military Conflict Between the U.S.S.R. and the P.R.C.," *Military Review* 57(3), pp. 28-37.

the buildup as in aid of military or foreign policy purposes that the existing Soviet strategic nuclear superiority over the P.R.C. did not serve and that presumably could not in the Soviet view have been served simply by increasing the Soviet strategic nuclear edge. It is possible, for example, that as the Cultural Revolution got under way the Soviets became skeptical of the Chinese ability to retain a rational appreciation of Soviet strategic nuclear might and decided that a more palpable military demonstration was called for; possibly the Soviets viewed increased border deployments as a much more feasible means than strategic nuclear deployments to keep the Chinese from shifting their forces from that front to potential service in Vietnam. These two questions are but a sample of the kind of question that merits careful investigation. For whatever the unique factors involved, an examination of the Chinese analogue may shed useful light on the considerations that would affect Soviet judgment regarding the political utility of strategic superiority over the United States--not the least of which might be the relative value of superiority in strategic nuclear arms versus the value of maintaining or augmenting other forces to serve foreign policy purposes.

The Cuban analogue, as earlier noted, has not been neglected by those attempting to calculate the political payoffs of strategic superiority. So far, much of the thinking about what the missile crisis meant to the Soviets has appeared to focus on the idea that in 1962 the Soviets probably took a kind of collective vow never again to permit themselves to be subjected to such humiliation. From this comes the conclusion (disputed by some, at least with regard to the extent of the crisis' catalytic effect) that the experience in Cuba was the motive for the Soviet strategic buildup of the 1960's. This explanation of the buildup makes more plausible the reasoning that if the Soviets could have decided in 1962 that the attainment of equality with the United States would help them avoid



future humiliation, then they might well have decided that the attainment of superiority would be even better.

It is necessary, however, to consider what other lessons the Soviets might have learned from the 1962 crisis. Besides domestic political lessons concerning the wisdom of letting Nikita Khrushchev remain in charge--or having a Khrushchev type succeed him--the Soviets may well have viewed Cuba as a study in the utility of local superiorities. Walter Slocombe and others have commented in this regard on the salience of the U.S. naval blockade.<sup>6</sup> The capability of the United States to deploy invasion forces to Cuba itself is an element that should not be overlooked in evaluating Soviet views of the significance of U.S. strategic superiority in determining the outcome of the crisis.

It is also important to view the Cuban analogue from a longer perspective. Even though the United States clearly maintained strategic nuclear superiority for roughly 6 to 7 years after the crisis, the U.S. Government was sufficiently sobered to avoid trying (overtly at least) to dislodge the Castro regime--a fact of which the Soviets are aware.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, assuming that the Soviets are not above doing a little mirror-imaging based on their own subsequent activities, they may well believe that a future "Cuba," in which they faced down the United States, could mean a short-term victory but possibly at the long-term price of galvanizing the United States to undertake a heavy military buildup. It is impossible to say whether such conclusions would carry more weight in Soviet assessments

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<sup>6</sup>Slocombe, *The Political Implications of Strategic Parity*, pp. 29-32.

<sup>7</sup>It might be noted here that the preservation of the Castro regime was the goal that Khrushchev himself has said the Soviets were pursuing in emplacing M/IRBM's in Cuba. Although that explanation had obvious face-saving utility for Khrushchev, it would be imprudent simply to discount it on that basis. See *Khrushchev Remembers*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1970), pp. 488-505.

of the political utility of strategic nuclear superiority than the kinds of conclusions that Mr. Nitze has adduced. Nevertheless, they can be derived from the crisis just as realistically, and thus are worth considering in greater detail.

#### C. FOREIGN POLICY ACTIONS BY THE U.S.S.R. AS A STRATEGIC NUCLEAR POWER

It is as yet not possible to make a case for or against the proposition that the strategic balance has had a clear effect on Soviet actions in the international arena. The principal reason for this is also the principal reason why future analyses are recommended. That is, one can only speculate on such matters until studies are completed that systematically seek to weigh the impact of the strategic balance factor as a determinant of Soviet behavior against other determinants in a given case, and enough cases have been examined to permit reasonably valid judgments on trends or patterns of Soviet behavior.

Such an investigation, which would certainly be necessary in order to determine the likely foreign policy impact of Soviet strategic superiority, has yet to be attempted. This deficiency is particularly surprising in light of both Western-Soviet international competition and the fact that Soviet and U.S. strategic nuclear capabilities presumably condition and constrain that competition. Part of the explanation for it may lie in the inherent difficulty of pinpointing the effect of any one factor on the international behavior of a state. (It would even be difficult to say for certain whether in the largest sense U.S. strategic nuclear capability and the U.S. alliance relationship backed up by that capability have deterred the Soviets from any significant aggressive act in the postwar era.) Part of the explanation may lie in a bias problem. It is possible that the Soviets would have been largely self-deterred from aggression in Western Europe, thus making NATO and the

U.S. nuclear guarantee superfluous.<sup>8</sup> While that possibility cannot logically be ruled out, it would obviously be extremely foolhardy to test it seriously. Consequently, in thinking about strategic balances and their effects, a natural bias (born of such prudential considerations) may be operating that assumes these balances must matter.

In addition, it is possible that the potential foreign policy impact of strategic balances has been as overdramatized and exaggerated as the economic significance of strategic weapons. While such weapons are certainly expensive, discussions about the economic burdens they impose frequently give the impression that the strategic arms component of the defense budget (for the United States, at least) is much larger than it actually is. Perhaps there is also a tendency, when analyzing the behavior of the superpowers in various foreign policy contexts, simply to take it for granted that these armaments play a large and important role. Regardless of the reasons, the essential point is that there has been little systematic effort to determine the role of the strategic balance factor in Soviet foreign policy activities in the postwar era.

#### 1. The Best Available Treatments

While no analysis has been completed that treats the role of the strategic balance factor via a series of appropriate case studies, five relatively recent studies can be cited as useful.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Estimating cause and effect relationships in regard to non-actions is obviously even more difficult than estimating those relationships in regard to actions. It is hard enough to determine whether the U.S. strategic nuclear capability was a factor in limiting Soviet aggression toward Western Europe (principally, Berlin in 1948, 1958-59, and 1961). It is much harder to ascertain whether there were (and are) aggressive acts against Western Europe that have not materialized because of Soviet cognizance of the U.S. strategic nuclear capability (and the guarantee to U.S. allies).

<sup>9</sup>J. F. Triska and D. D. Finley, *Soviet Foreign Policy* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1968), Ken Booth, (continued on next page)



These studies vary in their emphases and coverage, and none of them centers on the specific impact of the strategic nuclear balance factor on Soviet behavior in the international arena. Nevertheless, on the whole they do present a reasonably detailed survey of Soviet foreign policy actions which is both explicitly read against a backdrop of evolving Soviet (and U.S.) military capabilities, and aimed at assessing at least some of the troublesome questions raised by the prospect of Soviet attainment of strategic superiority, such as whether superiority would encourage Soviet risk-taking, adventurism, confrontation with the United States, or greater use of the military.

While all five studies examine the military factor in Soviet foreign policy, as might be expected (given differences in coverage and emphasis), the studies do not all offer the same conclusions. It is notable, however, that on the whole they either strongly emphasize that over the years the U.S.S.R. has been more conservative than adventurous in its foreign policies and more restrained than assertive in using military means to pursue these policies, or conclude that in these respects the

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(cont'd) *The Military Instrument in Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1972* (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, 1973), Hannes Adomeit, *Soviet Risk-Taking and Crisis Behavior: From Confrontation to Coexistence?*, Adelphi Paper No. 101 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1973), R. J. Vincent, *Military Power and Political Influence*, Barry Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan, eds., *The Use of the Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington, D. C.: The Brookings Institution, 1976). What may prove to be a much more useful aid to analysts than any of the above is currently in preparation as a companion piece to the Brookings study: Stephen S. Kaplan, et al., *The Kremlin's High Card: Soviet Armed Forces as a Political Instrument since the Second World War* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, forthcoming). It is unclear at this writing whether the study will seek to relate the various Soviet uses of the armed forces as a political instrument to changes over time in the Soviet-American strategic relationship--a crucial element, as noted in our efforts to evaluate the Soviet strategic superiority problem. Nevertheless, it does promise to be an indispensable point of departure for any such future efforts.

record is mixed. None affirms the popular image of rather consistent Soviet probing and assertiveness in the international arena which, in the absence of U.S. strategic nuclear superiority, might logically be expected to become more pronounced.

Hannes Adomeit offers what is the majority opinion:

What is remarkable in Soviet foreign policy over the past decade is its failure to fulfill Western predictions that the newly-won status as a super-power somehow required expansionist behaviour and risky ventures "commensurate" with it. Despite the temptations which may have existed ever since the Cuban missile crisis "to teach the imperialists a lesson," it stands to reason that such an approach has not been considered worth the risks, and that there has instead been a learning process derived from the limited benefits of previous initiatives, which often proved counter-productive, and from American failures to achieve political objectives despite the use and threat of force in Vietnam and elsewhere. This implies that the Soviet Union will not exploit strategic parity to gain the upper hand in military confrontations, but try to avoid them altogether, shaping the milieu without the manipulation of the risks of war.<sup>10</sup>

Lest one contribute undue weight to these remarks, it should be pointed out that this evaluation was made in 1973, prior to some of the more recent Soviet actions--most notably in Angola and Ethiopia--that have created particular concern with the prospect of increased Soviet aggressiveness consequent to the attainment of strategic superiority.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the study

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<sup>10</sup>Adomeit, *Soviet Risk-Taking*, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup>Faith Thompson Campbell, whose conclusions represent the minority view of the aforementioned studies, has the advantage here of being more up-to-date. Taking into account Soviet behavior in such contexts as the 1973 Yom Kippur War and Angola, she writes that particularly in the Third World, "since 1969 the Soviet political uses of their armed forces have been more assertive in several ways." (Faith Thompson Campbell, "Uses of Soviet Armed (continued on next page)

focuses heavily on risk-taking, confrontations, and crisis behavior in examining Soviet foreign policy activities, possibly to the neglect of the more subtle and amorphous effect of Soviet strategic capability on foreign policy--latent power (as Ken Booth has put it), as opposed to military force.<sup>12</sup>

Certain of the studies' other conclusions are also pertinent. One of the principal findings of the most exhaustive study (which, to be sure, is mostly geared to assessing U.S. actions) is that local balances are significant. Barry Blechman and Stephen Kaplan conclude that:

We did not find, as is often maintained, that the United States became less successful in the use of the armed forces for political objectives as the Soviet Union closed the lead in strategic nuclear weapons which had been maintained for

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(cont'd) Forces for Political Objectives" in Blechman and Kaplan, *The Use of Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, p. XV-48.) Writing of Soviet Third World activities, Campbell also notes: "Until the Soviets achieved strategic parity around 1969, however, they continued to exercise great caution in these actions particularly so as to avoid confrontations with the United States." (Ibid.) This would be an important finding especially for our present purposes, except that the only real support that Campbell offers for a cause and effect relationship between the Soviet attainment of parity and increased aggressiveness is that the two are (or were) roughly coeval. For a discussion of the significance of the Cuban proxies, the evolution of the Soviet blue water naval capability, détente, Western raw material needs, and the competition with China in affecting Soviet perspectives on involvement in Africa in the 1970's see P. W. Colm and K. F. Spielmann, *Sino-Soviet Involvement in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Element of Mutual Competition*, IDA Paper P-1350.

<sup>12</sup>Booth, *The Military Instrument in Soviet Foreign Policy*, p. 61. It is also pertinent to mention here the contribution of Edward Luttwak. Luttwak has been one of the most articulate recent expositors of the significance of distinctions between force and power, developing and refining concepts of "suasion" to deal with some of the less overt but nonetheless politically significant uses of military means. See in particular the stimulating discussion in Edward Luttwak, *The Political Uses of Sea Power*, Studies in International Affairs (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1974).



the first twenty years or so following the Second World War.... This finding can do little but add fuel to the debate, as this study was not designed to test the hypothesis about the effects of the strategic balance.... Still, both the aggregate analysis and the case studies provide little support for the notion that decisions during crisis are strongly influenced by aggregate military capabilities.... These case studies would seem to indicate that to the extent that evaluations of the military balance played any role, they were more clearly concerned with local balances of power. More to the point, most actors in these incidents seem to have had only a rudimentary and impressionistic sense of relative military capabilities.<sup>13</sup>

Another pertinent finding that emerges is how significant nonmilitary (not to speak of nonstrategic nuclear) means are to the pursuit of Soviet foreign policy goals. At a time when it is tempting to emphasize the significance to the Soviets of military means, because of both the growth and the visibility of these means (especially in contrast to Western estimations of Soviet ideological and nonmilitary economic capabilities), these studies provide a useful reminder that there are other important instruments of Soviet foreign policy. As Ken Booth puts it, "What can be said is that of the variety of tools available to Soviet foreign policy for acquisitive purposes, the military instrument has been an important one, but in a non-belligerent rather than a belligerent manner."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Blechman and Kaplan, *The Use of Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, p. XVI-9. As far as palpable impact of the strategic nuclear balance factor is concerned, it also should be noted that, whatever its significance as a background consideration, nuclear forces were in some way involved in less than 10 percent of the incidents examined (215 in which the United States utilized its armed forces for political objectives between January 1, 1946 and October 31, 1975) according to the authors (p. XVI-15).

<sup>14</sup>Booth, *The Military Instrument in Soviet Foreign Policy*, p. 60.

Overall, he concludes:

Military force has not been appraised as having a high utility in Soviet policy, not because of any dominating moral scruples, but largely because of the variety of external and internal constraints, the lack of a disposable military capability, the fact that many objectives have not been amenable to a military solution, the continued vitality of western forces and the rising costs of military intervention in an era of vigorous nationalism.<sup>15</sup>

It might be contended, of course, that the lack of disposable military means Booth cites as a factor has been compensated for by the recent growth of Soviet strategic nuclear capabilities. But if one also takes into account the findings of Blechman and Kaplan on the significance of local balances (and Campbell's conclusion that the Soviets appear to have been more militarily assertive in dealing with the Third World in the 1970's and on the whole more conservative in this respect elsewhere), then what might actually be the offsetting factor may be the Soviet blue water naval capability and Cuban proxies, not strategic nuclear capabilities. If true, this conclusion of course does not dispose of the question of the foreign policy significance of strategic superiority to the Soviets, but it does necessitate that the question be rephrased to read, "Would the Soviets be likely to view strategic nuclear superiority as significant because it enhanced the foreign policy utility of these other military means in ways that a parity status could not?"

## 2. Implications

None of the aforementioned studies is the ideal analysis of what foreign policy significance strategic superiority has for the Soviets. Like all readings of the record of Soviet foreign policy activities, these studies have to use imperfect

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

precedents, since there is no record of Soviet behavior as a strategic nuclear superior to the United States. Moreover, none of the studies contains the kind of deliberate assessment of the impact of the strategic balance factor in particular cases that is necessary to support broad judgments on the effect of the strategic balance on Soviet foreign policy. Nevertheless, until such assessments are attempted, this set of studies represents a preliminary guide to any evaluation of the foreign policy significance of Soviet strategic superiority. Judged by the criteria of basic relevance and breadth and depth of coverage, these studies are far more useful than analyses that focus on a single dramatic example (such as the Cuban missile crisis) or the most recent Soviet adventure, or that string together selected Soviet actions over the years to prove a point about the political payoff of Soviet strategic superiority.

Therefore, it seems sensible to incorporate the basic findings of these studies into our present investigation. The most pertinent findings are that, with the possible exception of certain actions in the Third World in the 1970's:

- The record does not support the idea that the Soviets have become more inclined to exhibit expansionist or risky behavior as their strategic nuclear standing vis-à-vis the United States has improved.
- The record does not support the idea that the Soviets have become more inclined to use the military instrument, as opposed to other means, to further their foreign policy objectives.
- The record does not indicate that in discrete incidents in which the military instrument was used for political purposes, the strategic balance factor mattered as much as local balance of forces (and perceptions of that local balance).

Taken by themselves, these findings tend on the whole to downgrade the political significance of strategic nuclear balance considerations and, by implication, the foreign policy utility the Soviets may (and may hope to) derive from strategic



nuclear superiority. However, these findings are very suggestive, pointing to further questions that should be posed and further areas that should be explored. Perhaps we miss much of the foreign policy significance of strategic nuclear balances if we look for it only in those cases in which it appears that strategic nuclear might has been involved. Perhaps much of the significance is missed if we focus largely on discrete incidents (confrontations, crises, or simply major foreign policy acts) rather than on the potential impact of strategic nuclear might (as latent power) on more subtle incremental alterations in the international environment.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the Soviets have gauged the utility of local balances of forces or nonmilitary foreign policy instruments in terms of a particular strategic balance; application of such instruments would thus reflect the influence of the strategic nuclear balance factor on Soviet international behavior. Examining some of the more notable aspects of the evolution of Soviet foreign and military policies toward Europe in the 1960's is a way of examining these possible interpretations of the uses of strategic nuclear superiority.

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<sup>16</sup>It should be pointed out that in his examination of European reaction to the Soviets, R. J. Vincent gives considerable attention to the broad impact of the basic image of Soviet power. See *Military Power and Political Influence*, especially p. 28.

#### IV

### THE EUROPEAN ANALOGUE: SOVIET BEHAVIOR IN A THEATER CONTEXT

As Hannes Adomeit has pointed out, the U.S.S.R.'s achievement of nuclear superpower status has not been accompanied by increased risk-taking and expansionist behavior. However, contrary to predictions made in the mid- and late 1960's, the U.S.S.R. has continued to develop strategic nuclear forces beyond the level and kind that would merely assure it a second strike capability. The obvious question posed is why the Soviets have continued to build up their strategic nuclear forces when they apparently have no intention of directly exploiting them for expansionist purposes and have already surpassed the level considered necessary to maintain a secure second strike capability.<sup>1</sup> Answering this question would do a great deal to illuminate the Soviet perception of the relationship between political influence and strategic superiority.

A roughly analogous situation exists with regard to Soviet defense and foreign policies in Europe. As the Soviets have built up their conventional superiority (and their theater nuclear capability) there, attempts to exploit military might to achieve foreign policy objectives have declined. The Soviet theater buildup in Europe can thus be used as an analogue that can profitably be examined to elucidate some of the Soviet reasoning behind the U.S.S.R.'s continuing strategic (central

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<sup>1</sup>This formulation begs several questions. As Dennis Ross has argued, in *Rethinking Soviet Strategic Policy*, the Soviets may have unique ideas about what constitutes deterrence and deterrence stability. It is also possible that the record of Soviet behavior as delineated by Adomeit (and others) is inaccurate. It is further possible that the buildup simply reflects Soviet concerns for "successful" war-waging, however a nuclear war might erupt.

systems) nuclear buildup. There are, of course, some considerations that are unique to the European case, which in some respects make it easier to explain the European theater buildup without assuming intent to pursue foreign policy goals through direct military action.

#### A. THE SOVIET MILITARY BUILDUP IN EUROPE

In the early 1960's, the Soviet military posture vis-à-vis Western Europe was highly escalatory, both by design (in the sense that it was in part a holdover or continuation of the Soviet "hostage Europe" stance) and by default (in the sense that the Soviets had been tardier than the West to develop tactical nuclear capabilities.)<sup>2</sup> The new systems that have come on board in the 1970's--the mobile (and hence less vulnerable), more accurate, and MIRVed SS-20 IRBM; the new fighters (especially the Fencer), with their greatly improved range, speed, and payload capabilities, which give them a genuine interdiction capability; and the Backfire bomber, which is regarded, whatever its potential intercontinental uses, as a superb theater and anti-naval weapon--could have equally ominous implications. Such systems could be intended to facilitate Soviet efforts to fight a conventional and/or theater nuclear war against NATO Europe. However, in speculating on possible reasons for the Soviet military buildup in Europe, we must keep in mind the Soviet Union's European location. It is also possible to view these systems not as indications that the Soviets are increasingly willing either to unleash a war in Europe or to take chances that would make such a war more likely, but as products in large part of an understandable Soviet desire simply to minimize the dangers to Soviet territory in the event of a

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, the pertinent discussion of Soviet warhead technology in Arnold Kramish, *Atomic Energy in the Soviet Union* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1959), pp. 124-26.



European conflict, however that conflict might erupt. Such dangers were particularly great in the early 1960's because of the vulnerabilities and limitations of the Soviet force posture then vis-à-vis Europe.

Thus, one can explain the growth and evolution of Soviet theater nuclear capabilities over the last decade and a half with reference largely to strictly military rationales and rationales, moreover, that can be regarded as ominous but may very well be more a product of geography and prudence. The basic decisions on the new systems that have entered the Soviet theater arsenal in the 1970's were made in the 1960's, when certain cost-benefit calculations could not have failed to impress Soviet policymakers. Whatever the deterrent value of the highly escalatory Soviet posture vis-à-vis Europe in the early 1960's it was a posture that would have maximized the costs of a European conflict to the U.S.S.R. (in terms of endangering Soviet territory) and minimized the benefits (potential Western European assets would have been reduced to rubble).<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it is not quite so puzzling that the Soviets should have made the military investments that have resulted in the development of so many new capabilities even as they appeared to be less willing to use their military capabilities--new or old--to achieve foreign policy gains directly.

Another consideration besides geography that is unique to the European case is that the extensive Soviet and American commitments in Europe create special concerns that would affect Soviet aggressiveness. Hence, the European context does not

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<sup>3</sup>For a stimulating dissent from this (the usual) point of view (that the Soviets early on maximized warhead yields in targeting Western Europe and hence would have inherited rubble in the event of a conflict), see Joseph D. Douglass, Jr. and Amoretta M. Hoeber, "The Nuclear Warfighting Dimension of the Soviet Threat to Europe," *The Journal of Social and Political Studies* 3(2).

necessarily offer direct lessons about Soviet willingness to exploit strategic nuclear means for foreign purposes in areas further from home where there are fewer Soviet or American commitments.

With these caveats in mind, it is instructive to look at how Soviet foreign policy in Europe evolved as the U.S.S.R.'s military status there was enhanced.

## B. SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY IN EUROPE: THE GERMAN TOUCHSTONE

Both because of its historical legacy and its potential future importance, Germany has been a focal point of Soviet policy toward Europe since World War II. This consistency is particularly fortunate, because it enables us to contrast Soviet attempts to achieve the same foreign policy goals using different methods--rather crude atomic threat diplomacy in the late 1950's and early 1960's and subsequent (successful) nonmilitary means.

### 1. Nuclear Diplomacy

While Khrushchev had already practiced nuclear saber-rattling in 1956, at the time of the Suez crisis, it was in spring 1957 that he tried to use such means to cope with the very troublesome prospect of Germany eventually posing a military threat of some proportions to the U.S.S.R. Having failed to block the F.R.G.'s entry into NATO in 1955, the Soviets were faced in early 1957 with the prospect that the F.R.G. could have access to tactical nuclear weapons within the NATO framework. Thus, in April Khrushchev sent a note to Bonn which threatened to turn Germany into a nuclear graveyard.

In subsequent months the Soviets put other nuclear arrows to their diplomatic bow. When Sputnik was launched in October of the same year, Soviet spokesmen reminded the world of its military implications. Another attempt at atomic threat diplomacy, albeit a less ominous one, was Polish Foreign Minister

Rapacki's proposal--also in October 1957--for a nuclear-free zone in central Europe.

These efforts basically came to naught. Indeed, in some respects they proved counterproductive, since "in December, 1957, the NATO Council resolved to station medium-range ballistic missiles in West Germany, as well as nuclear weapons under U.S. control."<sup>4</sup> This did little to daunt Khrushchev, however, for in November 1958, nuclear diplomacy was again used to exploit Western vulnerability with regard to another troublesome area of the German problem--the status of West Berlin. In that month, preparatory (as now seems clear) to a challenge to Western rights to Berlin, Khrushchev made a particular point of emphasizing that ICBM's were in production in Soviet armament plants.<sup>5</sup>

In November 1958, utilizing means somewhat reminiscent of the nuclear carrot and stick routine of October 1957, the U.S.S.R. commenced a de facto cessation of nuclear testing.<sup>6</sup> That this was not simply coincidental, but was intended to influence the bargaining over Berlin, is suggested by the fact that in 1961, during the Berlin crisis of that year, part of the Soviet effort to put pressure on the West was Khrushchev's

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<sup>4</sup>Robert Slusser, "Case Studies: The Berlin Crises of 1958-1959 and 1961," in Blechman and Kaplan, *The Use of the Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, p. XII-4.

<sup>5</sup>Arnold Horelick and Myron Rush, *Strategic Power and Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 50. This study is the classic treatment of Khrushchev's efforts to bluff the West with respect to the pace and scope of the U.S.S.R.'s first ICBM program in order, among other things, to serve Soviet foreign policy objectives with respect to Berlin.

<sup>6</sup>Slusser, "Case Studies," p. XII-46. Adam Ulam points out that as early as March 31, 1958, the Supreme Soviet had passed a resolution announcing the U.S.S.R.'s intention to suspend testing. See Adam Ulam, *The Rivals: America and Russia Since World War II* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. 294.



announcement that the U.S.S.R. was undertaking plans to resume nuclear testing. (This eventually resulted in the detonation of a 50-megaton warhead in October. As Slusser has pointed out, however, the blast itself could not have been intended to influence events in Berlin since the crisis was essentially over by that time--the wall had been erected in August).<sup>7</sup>

As the above discussion indicates, atomic threat diplomacy (not to mention other bellicose Soviet moves--such as the erection of the Berlin Wall) characterized the pursuit of Soviet foreign policy objectives vis-à-vis Germany in the late 1950's and early 1960's. What is notable about this diplomacy is that, on the whole, it was a failure.

The only limited policy success that the Soviets could claim was that they stopped the economically debilitating labor drain from East Germany. This was a result of construction of the wall, not a consequence of skillful atomic threatsman'ship. Indeed, on the whole, from a Soviet point of view the costs of atomic diplomacy--even apart from the risks of war--must have been rated as quite high. Overall, the tensions it caused created an atmosphere conducive to initiation of a variety of new military measures (both strategic nuclear and general purpose) by the United States. And Khrushchev's apparent conviction that one could perform foreign policy miracles with only the shadow of an intercontinental missile may well have set back the Soviets' own ICBM program.

Another aspect of the U.S.S.R.'s atomic threat diplomacy that should be noted is that it occurred at a time when the United States was clearly the nuclear superior. Obviously the

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<sup>7</sup>Slusser, "Case Studies," p. XII-77. However, it seems reasonably clear that Khrushchev intended to utilize the prospect of a resumption of testing as a means to pressure the West since he made those plans quite clear to the United States in July 1961 and, characteristically, exaggerated by promising to test a 100-megaton device.

Soviets were aware of the true status of their own ICBM effort; they could also have been expected to have some appreciation of the fact that by 1960 the United States had a 3 to 1 edge in intercontinental bombers.<sup>8</sup> It is also noteworthy that in the 1958-59 crisis the Soviets demonstrated more nuclear braggadocio and in 1961 they demonstrated less, even though by 1961 they had deployed MRBM's equivalent to "three times European over-kill."

## 2. The Security Campaign

During the 1960's the Soviets did not attempt further atomic threat diplomacy in Europe and turned instead to more subtle and less risky (if more complicated and time-consuming) diplomatic means to achieve the foreign policy goals regarded as desirable because of the German problem. To what extent this change was a result of specific lessons learned from the failures of Khrushchev's atomic diplomacy is difficult to say. The failures were palpable enough that they should have had some substantial effect on Soviet foreign policy calculations in Europe. However, opportunity also encouraged the Soviets to deal with the German problem using different means than Khrushchev had. And certain elements of the situation as it was in the late 1950's and early 1960's--such as the need to halt the labor exodus from East Germany and fend off political rivals at home--may have prompted Khrushchev to attempt an immediate solution.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>See Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe, 1945-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 179-80.

<sup>9</sup>Another element that is even more difficult to pin down is the China connection. That there was some connection between what Khrushchev was doing in Berlin and his dealings with the Chinese seems likely on the basis of three "coincidences": (a) that in the month Sputnik was launched and the Rapacki plan proffered, the Soviets made an agreement to assist the Chinese nuclear program (Slusser, "Case Studies," p. XIII-18); (b) that in November 1958, when the Soviets put pressure on Berlin, they had just recently weathered an apparent (continued on next page)

The diplomatic effort which the Soviets mounted in the mid-1960's to deal with the German problem was a part of Soviet détente policy as a whole and specifically Soviet détente policy in Europe. As such, that the effort was nonmilitary may have been partially determined by the fact that some of détente's other aims--such as increased access to Western capital and technology--are best served by other than military means. But solution of the German problem was (and is) also one of détente's themes. The diplomacy of détente apparently also had great appeal to the Soviets as an agency through which to secure some long-standing foreign policy objectives vis-à-vis Germany: to "regularize" the status of East Germany and, relatedly, make Berlin less of a sore point; and to increase the constraints on the F.R.G.'s eventual accession to nuclear status.

These were essentially the objectives Khrushchev had pursued unsuccessfully with atomic threat diplomacy in the late 1950's and early 1960's, and these were the objectives which a series of agreements and a security conference helped the Soviets secure in the late 1960's and early 1970's--even as the U.S.S.R.'s military status in Europe and strategic nuclear status improved, a fact which might have tempted some in the Kremlin to try once more to use atomic threat diplomacy. The agreements were the nuclear nonproliferation treaty (NPT) of 1968; the agreements renouncing the use of force and registering acceptance of the postwar territorial status quo between the U.S.S.R. and the F.R.G. (August 12, 1970) and the F.R.G. and Poland (December 7, 1970); the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin (September 3, 1971); and the F.R.G.-G.D.R.

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Chinese effort to pressure them to pursue the foreign policy interests of the bloc more boldly (the Quemoy-Matsu crisis); and (c) that Khrushchev at the 21st Party Congress in January 1959 followed up earlier efforts to secure a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe with efforts to secure a nuclear-free zone in the Pacific, and then in June (according to the Chinese, at least) ended Soviet aid to the Chinese nuclear program.



treaty (December 1972). The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which convened in 1973, capped the process by producing a formal document registering pan-European acknowledgment of the postwar territorial status quo.<sup>10</sup>

The Soviets regarded the signing of the NPT as a link to the agreements on Germany, agreements that they value most highly. The restraint exhibited by the Soviets in dealing with the Polish crises in December 1970 and January 1971 that toppled the Gomulka regime is thus most significant. Contrary to what the recently promulgated Brezhnev Doctrine might have portended, the Soviets responded not with troops but with a hard currency loan to the economically beleaguered Polish government.<sup>11</sup> Presumably they gave some consideration to the possibility that overt military action in Poland could interrupt or delay the détente process leading to the very desirable CSCE. More to the point, however, the Soviets had almost completed several very desirable agreements relevant to the German problem; military action in Poland might have jeopardized these agreements. A careful look at the time sequence bearing on the pertinent events reveals that at the time of the Polish crises, the NPT, the F.R.G.-Soviet, and the F.R.G.-Polish treaties had all been signed but not yet ratified. It seems very plausible that the importance of these agreements restrained the Soviets from using military force in Poland.

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<sup>10</sup>The CSCE was, in part, a reflection of Soviet appreciation of the security ramifications of Eastern bloc economic instability--which points to a broad Soviet concept of security comprising more than strictly military considerations.

<sup>11</sup>Robin Remington has made much of this point in her excellent study of the Warsaw Pact. See Robin Remington, *The Warsaw Pact: Case Studies in Communist Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 179-80. It was not only that the Brezhnev doctrine had been promulgated only 2 years before (in September 1968, immediately after the invasion of Czechoslovakia) but also that, in Remington's words, the Gdansk-Gdinya riots and their effects in Poland posed the first "post facto test" for it.

### C. IMPLICATIONS

As the Soviets did take certain military action to achieve foreign policy goals in the European context in the late 1960's and early 1970's, it would be erroneous to imply that other means were discovered to be so successful that military might was simply discarded as an instrument of foreign policy. It would also be erroneous to conclude that Soviet theater (or strategic) nuclear status in Europe was discounted as politically insignificant.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia is by far the best example of the U.S.S.R.'s willingness to use force to serve Soviet political objectives in Europe at this time. And it seems doubtful that the Soviets were unaware that improvements in their conventional and theater nuclear capabilities (as well as their strategic nuclear capabilities) helped ensure that the West would not interfere. Troop movements, intended to intimidate the Romanians and perhaps the Yugoslavs at the time of the Czech invasion (and in 1971 as well), also serve as evidence that military might was still valued for its direct political uses. Yet other reminders are the minor harassments around Berlin in the mid-1960's and the troop movements that were reported in southern Bulgaria in 1974, which were presumably intended as a message to the Turks during the Cyprus crisis of that year.<sup>12</sup> It is important, however, to keep these actions in perspective.

#### 1. The Czech Case

The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 had shown the world that the Soviet commitment to the Socialist Commonwealth was strong enough to justify the use of military action, even in a situation where, despite the strength of their ground forces in Europe, the U.S.S.R. was definitely the strategic inferior of

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<sup>12</sup>See Vincent, *Military Power and Political Influence*, p. 10.

the United States.<sup>13</sup> During the 12-year period that followed, however, the Soviets had established a record of apparent reluctance to use force to bring obstreperous allies back in line--as in the cases of China, Albania, and Romania. The invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 may therefore seem to be a return to earlier ideas of how to achieve specific foreign policy aims. Certainly nobody in 1968 should have had any illusion that the Czechs were favored by the same elements of geography or size that helped encourage Soviet forbearance toward Albania and China. But it is arguable that the Romanian case might have been applicable, and indeed, the Soviets dithered around in dealing with the Czechs, suggesting that only fairly late in the game was it decided to use troops to bring down the Dubcek regime.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, rather than necessarily representing a successful attempt to achieve foreign policy goals by using direct military means, the Soviet use of troops in Czechoslovakia can be interpreted as a confession that such an effort had failed. The Soviets first tried to use military bluster and bluff, in the form of Pact exercises involving Soviet troops on Czech territory, followed by removal of these troops, exercises in the Western U.S.S.R., and finally joint exercises with other Pact members near the Czech border, to influence the Czech government's actions. Not only does it appear that the invasion was carried out as a last resort (although preparations may have been begun early on for that contingency), but the Soviets were also apparently quite concerned--as they had not been in Hungary--about a particular cost: the potentially negative effect on détente, both in Europe and in their bilateral

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<sup>13</sup>Even so, Western preoccupation with the Suez crisis (and Western alliance strains because of it) doubtless played some part in Soviet calculations that the risks of a confrontation with the West over Hungary were not so high.

<sup>14</sup>This is brought out well in Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe*, pp. 374-79.



dealings with the United States. This concern is suggested by Soviet employment of the face-saving device of having other Pact members participate in the invasion and by the relative speed with which they renewed the collective security campaign and called for a collective security conference (in early 1969).

On the whole, therefore, while the invasion of Czechoslovakia certainly qualifies as a vivid reminder that the Soviets are still willing to use military means for political purposes, it must be remembered that a number of special factors should modify our conclusions about the use of force in that particular case. Moreover, in trying to determine what conclusions the Soviets are likely to have drawn from the Czech invasion to guide them in delineating future approaches to attaining specific foreign policy goals, one result that should not be overlooked is that the Soviets may have had to incur certain direct military costs.

The subsequent increase in the number of Soviet divisions stationed in East Europe (although probably not the later fleshing out of these 31 Soviet divisions) may have been prompted in part by severe doubts about the future reliability of the Czech forces, which could hardly have been expected to exhibit high morale and deep sympathy with the military aspirations of the Warsaw Treaty Organization's senior partner.

What is most pertinent to our current investigation, however, is that despite enhanced Soviet theater capabilities and overall strategic nuclear status, the U.S.S.R. in 1968 was on the whole more reluctant to use military means and more concerned about the counterproductive effects of doing so than in 1956, when a comparatively weaker U.S.S.R. invaded Hungary.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Admittedly, this appraisal does not rest on an exhaustive comparison of all the special factors surrounding the Czech and Hungarian cases and, as such, it illustrates the major point argued in this chapter--that detailed case studies are called for before judgments are rendered on the potential significance of Soviet strategic superiority.

To the extent that this judgment is reasonable, it tends to support the argument that the enhanced military status of the U.S.S.R. was not exploited through direct use because Soviet attitudes toward the political utility of direct military use had altered. If by 1968 the Soviets had become sensitive to the constraints and counterproductive effects of using force in Czechoslovakia, it was largely because of the significance they attached to using nonmilitary means to pursue foreign policy objectives in Europe (particularly with regard to Germany) that had earlier been pursued using military means.

In the final analysis, it is necessary to heed this broader perspective when formulating judgments on the Soviet understanding of the foreign policy significance of their theater or strategic nuclear capabilities. Analyses which fail to account for those instances in which the Soviets did not use military might for foreign policy purposes (and when they might have been expected to do so) are somewhat distorted. Of the five studies cited earlier that survey the Soviet uses of the military instrument, only one mentions the Polish crises of 1970-71.<sup>16</sup> In addition, none of the studies evidences any substantial appreciation of the significance of the Soviet shift to use of nonmilitary means to pursue basically the same foreign policy objectives with regard to Germany that had been pursued by means of blatant and rather crude atomic threat diplomacy.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. The Dialectics of Soviet Defense and Foreign Policies: Exploiting Military Might by Accommodation

The question that remains to be explored is whether in some indirect and subtle fashion the theater balance factor and/or

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<sup>16</sup>See Booth, *The Military Instrument in Soviet Foreign Policy*, p. 27. Booth appropriately cautions that no far-reaching conclusions should be drawn on the basis of this single case.

<sup>17</sup>Although, of course, the studies do take due notice of Khrushchev's uses of atomic diplomacy and his successors' failure to do so.

the strategic nuclear balance factor influenced the Soviet decision to carry out those foreign policy actions in the late 1960's and early 1970's cited above. Both factors may, to some extent, have entered into the Soviet decision to invade Czechoslovakia as elements in the calculation of risks involved in invading. And presumably the invasion itself facilitated achievement of Soviet objectives with regard to Germany in particular and the West in general by reminding the world that the U.S.S.R. is still the military giant on the European scene.

Various Western analyses have noted the effect of Soviet might on third countries and its basic utility in inducing, however slowly and marginally, certain "prudent" accommodations from these countries. This is a central theme in the study by R. J. Vincent cited above. And, as Vincent has pointed out, "the impact derived from the overall Soviet position of power and that derived from her military power is often impossible to distinguish."<sup>18</sup> Lothar Ruehl describes the ultimate effect of the image of Soviet might on Western Europe:

When the French President, for example, affirms in public (May, 1975, in Paris) that the problem of a West European defense organization could not usefully be approached because of "understandable Soviet fears" that such a new military grouping might threaten or create military pressure against the Soviet Union, it indicates the measure of appeasement that is inspired by Soviet politics.... One can argue the finer point whether this is a "coercion" or "persuasion" or simply "influence." One cannot deny the effectiveness of the Soviet protest in Paris and elsewhere. Here lies the problem of "finlandization of Western Europe."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Vincent, *Military Power and Political Influence*, p. 25.

<sup>19</sup>Lothar Ruehl, "The Soviet Threat to Western Europe: An Example of Theatre War Capabilities" in *The Future of Soviet Military Power*, Lawrence L. Whetten, ed. (New York: Crane, Russak and Co., Inc., 1976), p. 166.



Since our focus is on Soviet perspectives, we will not attempt to evaluate these appraisals of Western reaction. What should be noted, however, is that while the foregoing remarks define the Western view of the foreign policy impact of Soviet theater/strategic nuclear might, there are few clues here as to Soviet perspectives on the matter. We cannot simply assume that the Soviets opted to build up military might in Europe while exploiting it in restrained fashion because they expected the reactions adduced by Vincent and Ruehl. Similarly, we cannot assume that the Soviets calculated that it is necessary to attain a particular level of theater advantage (or future strategic nuclear advantage) in order to induce those reactions, since the West Europeans (and the Americans, for that matter) have exhibited a healthy respect for Soviet military might--regardless of its level--ever since World War II. And from a conventional arms standpoint, at least, according to several significant measures (such as manpower under arms, and tanks), the Soviets have had a superior capability on the continent since World War II.

3. If a Superior Conventional Capability, Why Not at the Strategic Nuclear Level?

The fact that the Soviets have achieved a superior conventional capability in Europe and seem reluctant to relinquish it<sup>20</sup> is a very tempting piece of evidence to cite on behalf of the argument that therefore, by extrapolation, it makes sense for the Soviets ardently to pursue strategic nuclear superiority over the United States. There are, however, certain distinctions that must be recognized. First, Soviet conventional

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<sup>20</sup>As the Soviets know, the West Europeans are well aware of this superiority. Soviet refusal in MBFR to accede to measures that would reduce the imbalance of forces makes clear their desire to see such superiority reaffirmed and preserved. See Lothar Ruehl, "The Negotiations on Force Reductions in Central Europe," *NATO Review* (October 1976).

superiority in Europe was essentially an outgrowth of pre-existing military strength (such as traditional emphasis on large land armies). These strengths were an asset that the Soviets happened to have on hand and be able to exploit, at the end of World War II in Europe, to establish and maintain the new strategic buffer zone in Eastern Europe (for which purpose, incidentally, a strategic nuclear air force would not have served). It could of course be argued that the Soviets could have chosen to demobilize even more soldiers than they did at the end of the war. But while possible postwar uses may have entered into the decision not to demobilize more troops, they certainly had nothing to do with the decisions that originally produced such superior forces as a necessary by-product of defeating the Reich.

Second, maintenance of this superiority (notwithstanding a number of manpower cuts the Soviets made from time to time) was motivated by the need and desire to compensate for deficiencies at the strategic nuclear level well into the 1960's. (To some extent the original Soviet emphasis on M/IRBM's can also be attributed to this need.) Certain additional considerations, such as the Soviet desire to alter the highly escalatory posture of the early 1960's and the necessity for the forces to serve a policing function, tend to militate for a less ominous interpretation of Soviet superiority on the continent. One can note in addition that the Soviets undoubtedly are aware of--and wish to compensate for--the fact that the allies of the United States can contribute more to American muscle on the continent than the U.S.S.R.'s allies can contribute to Soviet power.

Third, it is pertinent to point out that there is a considerable difference between avoiding actions that would diminish a preexisting superiority and taking steps to establish an unprecedented superiority. The former risks negating any previous foreign policy achievements (even if the precise

connection between that superiority and those achievements is not well understood) and wasting substantial investments (notwithstanding any future savings that might occur); the latter promises at best potential additional achievements at the price of substantial investments. None of this can explain fully why the Soviets cling so tenaciously to the kind of superiority they have achieved in the European context and is certainly not intended to suggest that such superiority is something about which the West should be sanguine. These considerations are probably helpful, however, in explaining why the Soviets have been comparatively more obstreperous in MBFR than in SALT. They are certainly germane to any effort to deduce from the U.S.S.R.'s long-standing conventional superiority in Europe a commitment to attain and exploit strategic nuclear superiority.

Finally, when considering what foreign policy impact the Soviets may associate with their conventional superiority in Europe, it is wise to keep the Czech case in mind. Although the invasion of Czechoslovakia, as noted above, may have served as a timely reminder that the U.S.S.R. is the military giant in Europe and may even have ultimately prompted a certain amount of European accommodation, under the circumstances it is simply not credible that the hope of attaining such accommodation was a crucial determinant of the Soviet decision to invade. For by invading, the Soviets risked the very process by which significant accommodations could best be formalized--namely, the negotiations that they sought as part of the collective security campaign.

Given this analysis of the European analogue, it is likely that Soviet perspectives on the relationship between defense and foreign policies incorporate the following conclusions:

- Certain foreign policy objectives are simply not feasibly pursued by direct exploitation of military might, whether one has superiority or not. Economic benefits, for example,



can of course be secured by going to war and gaining control of resources. However, nuclear diplomacy as practiced in the Berlin crises of 1958-59 and 1961, or military maneuvers, are not going to convince countries to regard the U.S.S.R. as a good place in which to invest capital or to which technology should be transferred or simply as a good trading partner. In short, certain apparent goals that détente policy has helped the Soviets pursue could not have been achieved by Khrushchev's nuclear diplomatic tactics.

- Military might may help to achieve foreign policy objectives by serving as a background factor, convincing other countries that it makes sense to improve overall relations with a country that could, in the event of war, destroy them completely. (It is here that commentators like Vincent and Ruehl have identified what is obviously a serious source of concern for the West.) When foreign policies are implemented against the backdrop of this image of military might, military factors can in an indirect way facilitate achievement of even seemingly unrelated objectives, like the securing of economic inputs.
- When diplomatic objectives are pursued without blatant recourse to military might, the buildup of that might can be accomplished without the reactions that might otherwise attend it. Since, as earlier noted, the Soviets had some very good military reasons for the buildup in capabilities in Europe that has occurred over the last decade or so, it would be overstating the case to argue that the Soviet Union has been pursuing a détente policy in order to build up its forces without occasioning the counterproductive reactions that Khrushchev's nuclear diplomacy helped produce.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the Soviets may well appreciate that in pursuing détente more or less concomitant with their buildup in Europe they have accomplished more in both a military and foreign policy sense than would have been possible in an earlier day.

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<sup>21</sup> However, perhaps the single most striking example of counterproductive military actions in postwar Europe for the Soviets to keep in mind is the Berlin blockade of 1948-49, which helped prompt NATO's formation.

If all this points to a kind of dialectical relationship between increased Soviet military capability and Soviet interest in making some serious effort at accommodation as a means to make that capability pay off in foreign policy terms, it is a relationship that is certainly ideologically acceptable to the Soviets and not likely to be abruptly altered. In this respect, the European case may suggest that some subtle and complex elements affect the Soviet evaluation of the political significance of strategic superiority, elements that are worthy of extensive and detailed appraisal by Western analysts. Analyses that focus on confrontations, crisis scenarios, and major discrete foreign policy actions have only begun to explore the foreign policy significance of Soviet strategic superiority.

PART THREE  
SOVIET PRONOUNCEMENTS AND DECISIONMAKING PROCESSES



Because Soviet attainment of strategic superiority would be unprecedented, analyses of international behavior can be only a partial guide to determination of the political significance of Soviet strategic superiority. We must attend not only to what the Soviets have practiced, but also to what the Soviets have preached. It is equally important to examine Soviet decisionmaking processes for clues as to the kinds of military and political considerations that are more relevant to their decisions on strategic arms. In Chapter V we examine the uses and abuses of Soviet commentary. In Chapter VI we do the same for decisionmaking analyses.

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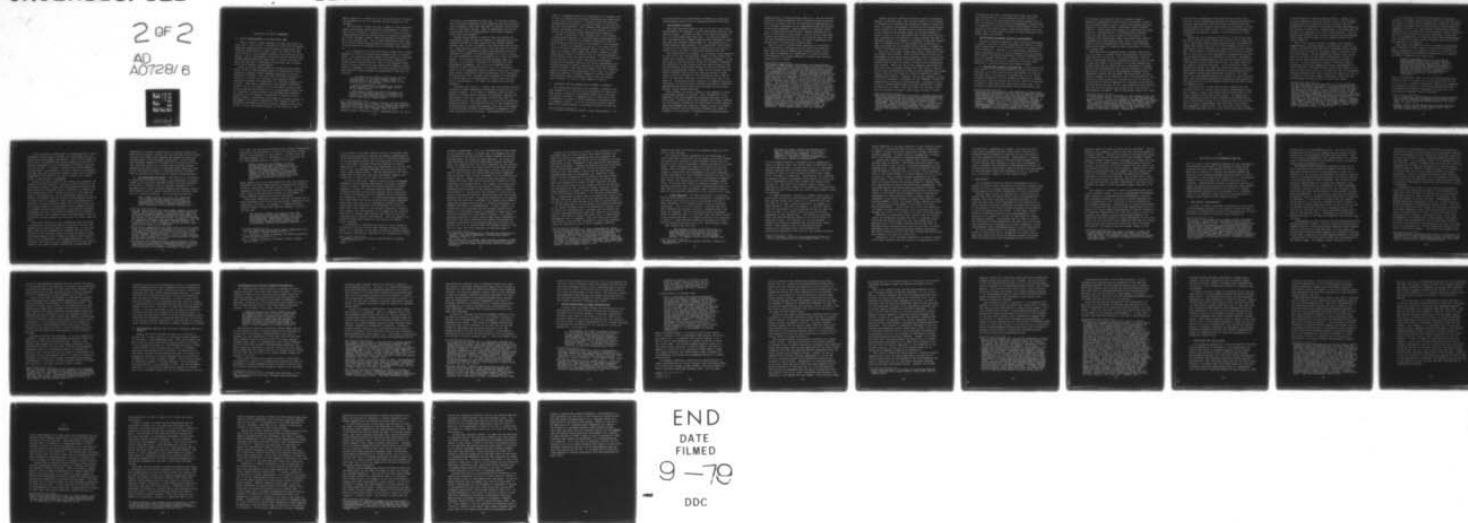
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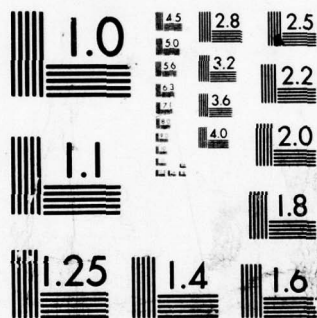


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V

THE UTILITY OF SOVIET COMMENTARY

A. SOVIET PRONOUNCEMENTS AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL

There is always a great temptation to take the Soviets at their word. Even if one is inclined to believe that in general, mendacity characterizes the way the Soviet leaders deal with their own people and the outside world, the analyst has very little access to other primary sources on the Soviet political system. And not suprisingly, the Soviets protect with the most intense secrecy precisely those areas of Soviet life that we most want and need to understand--the military and, in particular, the strategic nuclear sphere.

While we do have some sources of information about these areas, we do not have anything nearly so authoritative and detailed as an annual posture statement published by the U.S. Secretary of Defense. Nor do we have any Soviet equivalent to the kinds of studies and testimony that regularly deluge analysts of Western (and especially U.S.) defense programs and policies. Such Soviet commentary as does appear in military journals (or in the journals of the two premier research institutes in Moscow, the Institute of U.S. and Canadian Studies and the Institute of World Economics and International Relations) is notable for the absence of discussion of specific Soviet weapon systems. And finally, with regard to so basic a piece of knowledge as the nature, composition, and lineage of what is apparently the highest political-military organizational entity in the U.S.S.R., the Defense Council, we are still not even

wholly agreed as to whether what we are talking about is really the equivalent of the U.S. National Security Council or the Pentagon.<sup>1</sup>

The temptation to make the most of general Soviet pronouncements, particularly Soviet military pronouncements, is therefore not so surprising. Moreover, as we do not have a precise understanding of the data deficiencies we confront in analyzing the Soviet strategic threat, these pronouncements can prove to be a very enticing trap. For the data deficiencies that tempt us to turn to Soviet pronouncements for guidance will also make it very difficult to determine just how reliable that guidance is.

As a consequence, even the most astute analyst can be caught reading a lot more into Soviet pronouncements than is actually there. One relatively recent example will suffice to illustrate the point. Edward Luttwak cites the following comments, by Soviet Defense Minister Ustinov, CINC of the Strategic Rocket Forces Tolubko, and Chief of the General Staff Ogarkov, respectively, as examples of statements by Soviet military officials that should be taken seriously as indications of bellicose intentions:

Our party and the entire Soviet people, following the behest of our great leader, regard the strengthening of the country's defense and of its armed forces as a sacred duty....

...we need constantly to strengthen the country's defense capability and the combat might of the Soviet armed forces....

...The Communist party and Soviet government are adopting all necessary measures to strengthen the country's defense capability and to increase the Soviet armed forces' combat might.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See James McConnell, "The Gorshkov Articles, the New Gorshkov Book, and Their Relation to Policy," in *Soviet Naval Influence: Domestic and Foreign Dimensions*, Michael McGwire and John McDonnell, eds. (New York: Praeger, 1977), p. 614

<sup>2</sup>Edward Luttwak, "Churchill and Us," *Commentary* 63(6), pp. 46-47.

But what do such statements really say? If the term "Soviet" and the pointed references to the Communist party were excised, these statements could have been made by defense officials anywhere in any public speech. What of significance can we possibly deduce about the ominousness of the Soviet strategic threat from such remarks?

Besides being tempted to read too much into Soviet pronouncements, there is also the problem of claiming that we are taking the Soviets at their word when they address defense matters, when in fact our method of analysis shows that we are not. What sustains this attitude is the idea that the Soviets cannot afford to dissemble in those pronouncements that are intended as messages to officials within the U.S.S.R. and are not just designed for foreign consumption or to gull the Soviet masses. It is probably true that what Brezhnev says in a speech to a multitude of officials is something more than meaningless propaganda. But if we truly regarded such a speech as totally reliable would we not, as a consequence, treat it as an independent means by which to test our hypotheses about Soviet intentions or Soviet motivations for a particular foreign policy move? Instead, what we generally do is regard as correct what we are predisposed to believe and treat the rest as unbelievable, or at least not worthy of any serious attention.

The point here is not, of course, that the problem should be resolved by simply regarding everything the Soviets say as completely reliable. It is rather to emphasize that the availability of various Soviet speeches and writings, combined with great gaps in data and a legitimate concern about what the Soviets are up to, can easily tempt us to slip into unfortunate analytical habits. This applies not only to the treatment accorded particular Soviet pronouncements but also to the degree to which we rely on Soviet pronouncements as compared to the other analytical tools available. The probability of error



seems to be greatest when we are operating on the premise that, in lieu of delving into the murky intricacies and complexities of the nature and evolution of relevant Soviet military and foreign policy activities, it suffices merely to sit high and dry and clip quotations. That practice unfortunately does not keep us from being selective, but it does deprive us of the context we need even to begin evaluating our selections.

By way of offering a final reminder here of the extreme care we should exercise in utilizing Soviet pronouncements, it is pertinent to offer as an example an admonition from one whose words are near and dear to the hearts of true believers. Is V. I. Lenin to be regarded as giving us the goods when he says "To tie one's hand beforehand, openly to tell the enemy, who is at present better armed than we are, whether we shall fight him, and when, is stupidity and not revolutionariness."<sup>3</sup> Do the Soviets take this Lenin seriously? If they do take this Lenin seriously, can we infer that their pronouncements, especially on military matters, will become increasingly more reliable guides for Western analysts as the Soviet strategic buildup proceeds? What does this suggest about the truth quotient in present Soviet statements? All of this, of course, makes any exercise in Talmudic exegesis of Soviet defense pronouncements seem increasingly silly. And, as we should bear constantly in mind, in many respects it may be.

#### B. CLAUSEWITZ AND THE CORRELATION OF FORCES, IN CONTEXT

The foregoing discussion is not intended to advocate that what appears to be a key source of information on Soviet military plans, priorities, and concerns should not be utilized. Our purpose is simply to emphasize that in using Soviet pronouncements as a guide to Soviet intentions, the analyst must be extremely careful. It is all too easy to believe either that Soviet pronouncements on militarily sensitive topics are

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<sup>3</sup>V. I. Lenin, as quoted in Adomeit, *Soviet Risk-Taking*, p. 16.

calculated solely to mislead Western observers, or that such pronouncements reflect Soviet thinking accurately and fully.

### 1. The Problem of Context

What this basically means is that if we are to use Soviet pronouncements for guidance, we must take special pains to read them in context. As banal as that bit of advice may appear to be, it is more easily said than done. One obvious problem is that the analyst quite simply lacks the data necessary to determine what the relevant context might be. Recognizing the intended audience (when possible) for a particular Soviet speech or article is of course a useful starting point, but there is likely to be a lot more to solving the problem than that.

One complication, for example, is the device, which apparently grew out of the conspirational climate in which Soviet communism was nurtured, of resorting to Aesopian language. In the early days of the Sino-Soviet schism, for instance, Yugoslavia was referred to by the Chinese when they were actually attacking the Soviets; Albania was referred to when the Soviets were actually attacking the Chinese. While we in the West now feel fairly confident that we can tell when the device is being used, we should be mindful of the possibility that it may actually be used more often and in more subtle ways than we are aware of. Particular phrases, concepts, or emphases may have a connotation to Soviet military insiders that Western observers, hampered by the secretiveness that surrounds Soviet military matters, cannot readily perceive.

This problem, of course, relates to the language in which a particular message is conveyed. More fundamental is the question of why the message was considered necessary in the first place. Leaving aside those messages that might be mainly (or even solely) intended for an identifiable foreign audience, there are messages that might be conveyed as part of polemics between the party and the military, messages that might be intended to score points in bureaucratic in-fighting between

armed services or within services, and so on. One can pin down potential internal polemical uses of Soviet military pronouncements to the extent that one can identify the organization--or the individual spokesman for an organization--that has authored a particular statement. Identification of a discrete issue--e.g., a particular defense policy or weapons program--as the bone of contention is also helpful. But it is not always easy to make such identifications nor, once they are made, to evaluate the statements appropriately in terms of determining the possible mix of motives that prompted them."

There is also an international dimension to the problem. It is important to juxtapose what the Soviets are saying to what they are doing in defense and foreign policies, rather than simply trumpeting the significance of Soviet military pronouncements per se and attempting to define their meaning essentially in a vacuum.

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"Identifying organizational affiliations and organizational interests is often tricky, particularly in the case of the Main Political Administration--a unique organization which is both part of the Ministry of Defense and the functional equivalent of a department of the Party's Central Committee Secretariat. It has proved quite difficult to determine where the MPA's basic loyalties really lie and hence whether to attribute the views articulated by its "spokesmen" to a "party" position, a "military" position, or a "joint" position (advanced by some political and military types against some other political and military types). Since the MPA appears to exercise a basic editorial control over the bulk of Soviet military publications, it may affect what Westerners can read by causing certain formulations to be used and certain emphases to be given that are regarded as politically necessary, even if they give a tone to the piece that the original author may not necessarily have intended. For an excellent brief discussion of the MPA and Soviet military pronouncements, see Edward L. Warner, III, *The Military in Contemporary Soviet Politics: An Institutional Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1977), pp. 72-76. See also, on other internal polemical uses of Soviet military pronouncements, Benjamin S. Lambeth, "The Sources of Soviet Military Doctrine," in *Comparative Defense Policy*, Frank B. Horton et al., ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1974), pp. 200-216.



Perhaps the most invidious analytical pitfall encountered, however, is Western bias. Bias is most likely to be a problem in attempting to establish the appropriate domestic context in which to evaluate the meaning of Soviet military pronouncements. Since certain of the concepts used to guide the attempt, such as the concept of an interest group, are clearly Western in origin, there is a very good chance that Soviet political-military realities will be distorted if these concepts are used to determine whether, for example, a statement by some SRF "spokesman" is intended merely to "rationalize" the acquisition of some new missile by the Strategic Rocket Forces or instead reflects a doctrinally sanctioned, bona fide strategic purpose.<sup>5</sup>

There are also other, perhaps more subtle biases with which the analyst must contend. Since putting Soviet military pronouncements in the proper Soviet domestic context runs the risk of reading Soviet actions in American terms, it is tempting to maintain that we need not choose a context, thus avoiding that bias problem. After all, one of the arguments supporting the idea that Soviet military writings are, ipso facto, a guide to Soviet plans and priorities is that in these writings the Soviets cannot afford to lie, since they serve an important internal communication function. However, even if that argument is true, it is still necessary to determine in what domestic context the communication function is being exercised. Otherwise we have no way of knowing whether what is being communicated is really as obvious as it seems. More often than not, however, we accept the military writings at face value, victims of a bias

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<sup>5</sup>The best overall discussion of the need to analyze Soviet politics using concepts that are more in line with Western social science theorizing than the standard totalitarian model is in Jerry Hough, *The Soviet Union and Social Science Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977). The best critique of the efforts thus far to analyze Soviet politics in interest group terms is in William Odom, "A Dissenting View on the Group Approach to Soviet Politics," *World Politics* 28(4).

(fostered by the need to know what the Soviets are doing) that disinclines us to risk testing what seems certain.<sup>6</sup> There is also a very good chance that Western biases will affect the selection of the relevant international context that is juxtaposed to the Soviet military pronouncements cited. Depending on the context chosen, these pronouncements can seem either more or less ominous and more or less revealing of true Soviet plans and concerns.

## 2. The Military Instrument, Politics, and Economics

The above discussion applies to Soviet military statements in general, not just to those statements that appear to reveal Soviet perspectives on the political utility of strategic nuclear superiority. However, it is particularly applicable to Soviet statements on two of the key concepts that have become focal points for Western evaluations of Soviet thinking on the topic of strategic superiority. These concepts, the political nature of nuclear war and the correlation of forces, seem especially to receive selective and biased treatment.

a. The Political Nature of Nuclear War. Soviet statements with respect to the political nature of nuclear war seem to be analyzed, as we have noted earlier, particularly in terms of how they bear on the question of whether the U.S.S.R. values strategic superiority for its promise of victory in a central nuclear war, and thus whether the U.S.S.R. would be increasingly likely to take risks that could lead to such a war. The assumption underlying such analysis is that the Soviets view

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<sup>6</sup>Obviously that disinclination can be defended on the grounds that Soviet pronouncements not only serve an important internal communication function but also that that function is exercised in a totalitarian context wherein top officials carefully orchestrate and control the flow of information. One must be careful in making too much of this decisionmaking argument, however. A regime that is so in control that, for example, communications for the purposes of interest group articulation seem implausible is the kind of regime that would also appear to be capable of practicing disinformation on a grand scale.

the writings of Clausewitz (and the Leninist update of Clausewitz) regarding the utility and the necessity of war to serve political goals as still valid in the nuclear age with respect to all sorts of wars, including a central nuclear conflict.<sup>7</sup> These ideas run contrary to certain Western views about the overriding import of deterrence and deterrence stability, and when they are placed in the context of a strategic arms buildup that seems to go beyond what would be consistent with such Western views, there is a strong presumptive case for arguing that the Soviets value strategic superiority because it enhances their feasibility of victory in a nuclear war.

Even were such an argument proven, however, there would still be reason to examine Soviet pronouncements on the political nature of nuclear war. Such pronouncements, like the types of historical analysis recommended earlier, could be used to shed some light on the question of how much emphasis the Soviets would put on nuclear war as an instrument of foreign policy, thus revealing how much risk was implied for the West. What should in that case be investigated is whether Soviet commentary supports the hypothesis that superiority would be valued so highly for its potential payoff in enhancing the prospects of a Soviet victory in a nuclear war that (a) the goal of superiority could be regarded as a principal motivation behind the Soviet buildup, and (b) once superiority were achieved, the risk that the Soviets would actually go to war would be significantly increased. Part of any proper inquiry into these

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<sup>7</sup>The best overall Soviet discussion of this premise is Maj. Gen. A. S. Milovidov and Col. V. G. Kozlov, ed., *The Philosophical Heritage of V. I. Lenin and Problems of Contemporary War* (Moscow, 1972). As previously noted, perhaps the most widely circulated recent Western commentary on the relevance of this premise to an estimate of Soviet perspectives on the winnability of a central nuclear war is Richard Pipes, "Why the Soviet Union Thinks it Could Fight and Win a Nuclear War."



questions must investigate the possibility that Soviet articulation of the contemporary relevance of Clausewitz-cum-Leninist concepts regarding the connection between military means and political ends is relevant to more than just the matter of their relationship in the event of war. It is therefore necessary to investigate the domestic context of the articulation of these concepts.

Whether war is an extension of politics in the nuclear age has been a matter of much controversy in the U.S.S.R. since the 1950's, when some Soviet military writers sought to demonstrate, among other things, that Stalin's "Five Permanent Factors" of warfare were not so permanent and needed updating in the nuclear age. Major General N. Talensky emerged as the principal spokesman for this point of view, arguing that thermonuclear war could not be treated simply as an extension of politics. Khrushchev himself (perhaps demonstrating a lesson he had learned from the Cuban missile crisis) stated bluntly that the atomic bomb does not abide by the class principle. In the mid-1960's, after Khrushchev's ouster, the issue was hotly discussed in the Soviet press, with Colonels Grudin and Rybkin spearheading the argument against the Talensky (Khrushchev) position. The topic came in for considerable debate more recently in late 1973-early 1974, with views being expressed by individuals associated with the Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies and the Main Political Administration.

The basic point of this brief review is simply that the political nature of nuclear war has been a controversial issue for a number of years, and touches many different areas of the Soviet domestic politico-military context. At perhaps the least significant level it has a bearing on the morale factor in the Soviet armed forces, in the sense that war with the prospect of victory is presumably more uplifting to the troops than engaging in mass suicide. But the morale factor (which the Soviets make much of) is in turn tied to the party's overall

role with respect to Soviet military affairs. Indeed, it is at least suggestive that over the years some of the strongest articulations of the political nature of nuclear war have emerged from the precincts of the Main Political Administration. The concept is, after all, a useful means of affirming that war is still "too important to be left to the generals." The opposing view certainly does little to sustain the long-standing Soviet tenet that the party is the ultimate arbiter of all Soviet affairs.<sup>8</sup>

This is by no means intended to suggest that arguments emphasizing the political nature of nuclear war should not be viewed as advocacy of more and better strategic forces--indeed, possibly even the need for strategic nuclear superiority over the United States. We are suggesting, however, that on more than one occasion the idea might be emphasized in order to make a point about appropriate party-military relations in U.S.S.R. On some occasions it might be utilized to make a particular point about command and control requirements, related obviously to the key question of who would really be running the show in the event of a nuclear war, but not necessarily implying anything about Soviet eagerness to fight such a war or to achieve a particular margin in strategic forces over the United States in order to make "victory" more likely.

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<sup>8</sup>On the other hand, one must be careful to avoid attributing the political motive too readily to writers identified with the MPA. Wolfe has noted that in the "debate" over the political nature of nuclear war in late 1973-early 1974, the "MPA group" seemed to be arguing largely against writers (some of whom had military credentials but were, on the whole, even less directly affiliated with the military) who were associated with the Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies, such as G. A. Arbatov, G. A. Trofimenko, M. A. Milshtein, and L. S. Semeiko; this suggests that the debate may have been largely over strategic force levels at the time. See Thomas W. Wolfe, *Military Power and Soviet Policy*, P-5388 (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, 1975), pp. 34-35, 76.

It is important to stress that the legacy of Clausewitz and Lenin is probably being reflected most truly when the political nature of nuclear war is emphasized as a means of affirming the party's ultimate control over the uses of the military instrument in the U.S.S.R. Both authors offered their arguments regarding war as an extension of politics not so much to advocate the use of the military as one more instrument of statecraft but, more fundamentally, to make the point that notwithstanding how the military is used, political purpose still must be the most important consideration.

That this is an element in Soviet thinking is illustrated most obviously by Soviet censure of those who "mechanically" apply Clausewitzian (or Leninist) notions in the nuclear age. Inveighing against the theories of Herman Kahn, for example, one Soviet commentator has argued that:

Bourgeois propaganda strives to play down the actual danger of modern war involving the use of missile-delivered nuclear weapons. Soldiers and civilian militarists advance blasphemous theories concerning the "rationality" of nuclear war and train public opinion in capitalist countries to believe that the consequences of such a war are entirely "tolerable" and "acceptable."<sup>9</sup>

And in the mid-1960's, when one of the debates regarding the political nature of nuclear war was being carried on in the U.S.S.R., Col. I. Grudin in accused Col. Rybkin, who emphasized the continued relevance of the Clausewitzian-Leninist tenet, of slipping into bourgeois thinking on the topic by overstressing the "hardware factors" involved.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Col. A. Migolatyev, "Anticommunist Ideology, Western Militarism Scored," *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil* (January 1972), trans. by Joint Publications Research Service, No. 55420 (March 13, 1972), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Military Policy Trends Under the Brezhnev-Kosygin Regime*, P-3556 (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, 1967) pp. 8-9.



If the criticism of Herman Kahn is intended merely to score propaganda points against the West, one could argue that the Soviets are simply being inconsistent: that it's all right for the U.S.S.R. to maintain that nuclear weapons can serve as a rational instrument for the achievement of political goals but not for the West. Of course, there may be a double standard involved here. But Grudinin's censure of Rybkin on essentially the same point was intended for Rybkin's eyes, even if Western commentators also spied it out, and is difficult to explain solely on the grounds of propaganda.

The point is that insofar as the Soviets are concerned, the meaning of Clausewitz-Lenin is actually being distorted if one uses their writings to argue that the military instrument--and particularly the strategic nuclear instrument--is endowed with such significance that it drives politics, not the other way around. By arguing thus, one is essentially saying that (a) military instruments and particularly nuclear weapons should be accorded a role of primacy in terms of the instrumentalities available to pursue political goals, and (b) their utility in this regard should not be constrained by an extreme reluctance to consider actually employing them. Such nuclear fetishism downgrades the role of the Soviet ideology and, by extension, its interpreter, the Communist Party, and presumably courts unnecessary risk when employed in the service of Soviet political aims.

This brief discussion is not intended to prove that these considerations are and have been at the heart of Soviet commentary on the political nature of nuclear war. It does suggest, however, that reading such commentary without due reflection on the context in which it occurs can easily distort our understanding of what it means in terms of Soviet appreciation of the significance of strategic superiority. One can certainly find support in this commentary for the idea that the Soviets would value strategic superiority as enhancing the

feasibility of victory in the event of a central nuclear war.<sup>11</sup> There is also support, however, for the view that for the Soviets this may be at least only a partial and perhaps not very compelling reason to seek strategic superiority. To the extent that strategic superiority is valued for its political utility, that value may surface in a context where strategic nuclear weapons have a place, but not a dominant place, among the other policy instruments available to the Soviet state, and where they can maintain that place without actually being employed.<sup>12</sup>

b. The Correlation of Forces. The topic of the correlation of forces has also been the focus of much discussion in Western commentary on the Soviet strategic threat, and this discussion can be read to indicate that the military instrument is so supremely vital a part of Soviet thinking that strategic superiority seems not only a natural ambition for the Soviets to have but also a priority ambition. As Uri Ra'anana has written:

What emerges clearly is not only the underlying Soviet conviction that military superiority is both desirable and attainable, but also Moscow's determination to create a general perception of Soviet superiority at the earliest possible date.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Yet even here we should note such Soviet comments as the following: "Given the priority of strategic forces, when both sides possess weapons capable of destroying many times over all life on earth, neither the addition of new armaments nor an increase in their destructive power can bring any substantial military--and still less political--advantage." Maj. Gen. R. Simonyan, as quoted in Garthoff, "Mutual Deterrence in Soviet Policy," p. 142. Garthoff sees this as fairly representative of current Soviet thinking.

<sup>12</sup>Since Soviet commentators have argued both pro and con on the issue of nuclear war as an extension of politics, it would be ridiculous to claim that this reading of the Soviet outlook is a universally accepted position. It is the kind of position, however, that would seem to reflect a broad consensus on the topic--acceptable to a fairly broad spectrum of Soviet military and political interests.

<sup>13</sup>Uri Ra'anana, *The Changing American-Soviet Strategic Balance: Some Political Implications*, memorandum presented to the Subcommittee on National Security and International Operations of the Committee on Government (continued on next page)

To be sure, one can easily interpret recent Soviet references to the shift in the correlation of forces as revealing a Soviet belief in the supremacy of the military. Ra'anana cites the following remarks by G. A. Trofimenko, of the Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies, in support of his point:

Further change in the alignment of forces between the chief power of imperialism and the leading socialist country in the latter's favor is the most important factor.... U.S. leaders are obliged publicly to acknowledge changes in the strategic situation which are unfavorable for the United States and to take into account the growth in the U.S.S.R.'s might.<sup>14</sup>

These remarks carry the strong implication that the concept of correlation of forces means basically correlation of military forces--in particular strategic nuclear forces. It is not unreasonable to infer from such remarks that since strategic parity with the United States is good, the achievement of clear strategic superiority would be even better.

While such remarks are certainly valuable as indications of Soviet thinking, they are not the only Soviet commentary on the correlation of forces. For example, in Defense Minister Ustinov's recent "Victory Day" article, emphasis is given to the fact that

The objective reality of our days is such that sociopolitical forces have emerged in the world that are growing, operating actively and capable of averting war. These forces are the Soviet Union and the entire socialist community, the international communist and workers' movement....<sup>15</sup>

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(cont'd) Operations, United States Senate (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup>G. A. Trofimenko, quoted in Ra'anana, *The Changing American-Soviet Strategic Balance*, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup>D. F. Ustinov, "Victory in the Name of Peace," *Pravda* (May 9, 1978), p. 2.



In an article on the same occasion, Chief of the General Staff Ogarkov quotes Brezhnev as saying that Western commentators on the Soviet military threat "do not want to reconcile themselves to the approximate balance that has come about in the correlation of the sides' military forces and they want to achieve superiority."<sup>16</sup> In discussing the significance of the fact that the U.S.S.R. has developed strategic arms (and that they are combat ready) Ogarkov notes: "And the advocates of war can no longer fail to take this, and also the general change in the correlation of forces in the world into account."<sup>17</sup>

It is true that these comments could be Soviet propaganda, designed to soothe Western unease about the Soviet strategic threat in order to keep SALT on track and generally inhibit arguments on behalf of increased Western defense measures. (Similar questions of motive and audience can of course also be raised in connection with the comments cited by Ra'anan on the correlation of forces.) It nevertheless seems significant that these high-level Soviet political and military spokesmen should take some care to (a) distinguish strategic nuclear forces from other elements in the correlation of forces; (b) argue that, with respect to the military components, "approximate balance" has been achieved, not an edge for the Socialist camp; and (c) maintain that factors other than just military ("sociopolitical forces") count heavily. There do appear to be important nonmilitary aspects to the concept, according to Soviet thinking.

In attempting to determine the utility of such remarks as indicators of how the Soviets might evaluate strategic superiority, it is important to note that the Soviets probably regard the broader, nonmilitary dimensions of the correlation of forces

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<sup>16</sup>N. Ogarkov, "The Soviet People's Great Exploit," *Izvestia* (May 9, 1978), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

concept as significant. As in our consideration of the concept of the political nature of nuclear war, our judgment here can be distorted if we allow the most visible element--the purely military factor--to become the most important. We should not thus depreciate the political-ideological concerns mentioned above, in connection with the Soviet commentary on the political nature of nuclear war, and Soviet social and economic concerns.

Such distortion is not always easy to avoid. Because the Soviets tend to gloss over their deficiencies and exaggerate their successes, some of their statements on the correlation of forces--even in a broader context--do have the effect of reinforcing our belief that they are really only interested in the correlation of military forces. For example, the Soviets have stated that "the tilting of the balance of forces in favor of socialism [has occurred] in every sphere--economic, political and military."<sup>18</sup> We know that this statement is true only insofar as the military sphere is concerned--and that the Soviets probably know it as well. The natural assumption is, therefore, that they can make such a statement only because they honestly regard the economic and political as basically irrelevant, including them simply as windowdressing. In fact, however, the Soviets are truly concerned with the economic and political sphere; it is partially because of problems in these areas that they are participating in the détente process. It is hardly realistic, however, to expect them to make public statements to the effect that while militarily the forces of socialism are strong, economically and politically they are in trouble, especially as it is in contexts where the military balance is the point at issue that such statements are generally made.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>L. Vidyasova, "The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: A Successful Beginning," *International Affairs* (September 1973), p. 13.

<sup>19</sup>The Soviets have, of course, aired economic problems in their press in other contexts, and they have claimed that improved economic relations between East and West would be mutually beneficial.

Because the Soviets are reluctant to call attention to their weaknesses does not mean, however, that Western analysts can assume the Soviets are exaggerating when they emphasize the significance of the military factor in the correlation of forces (especially as their assessment of that factor does seem generally more believable). Western recognition that such reluctance exists should rather suggest that Soviet discussions of the concept of the correlation of forces are not particularly straightforward and, in consequence, are simply not a good guide to Soviet assessments of the value of strategic superiority. On the one hand, if we believe what the Soviets say about the correlation of forces, we must logically conclude that the military factor is not supreme in Soviet calculations and the Soviets are not striving to attain a position of strategic superiority in order to force further favorable changes in the international environment. (It certainly seems reasonable to assume that the party retains as much basic faith in the economic and social system, and in the ideology that underpins the party's role in that system, as it does in the military.<sup>20</sup>)

On the other hand, if we are going to be basically skeptical of all Soviet statements about the correlation of forces, then it seems a bit contradictory to maintain that the Soviets are obviously dissembling--except when they refer to the military factor. This kind of selectivity gives rise to a particularly disingenuous line of argument: that the Soviets have pinned their hopes on the military instrument to help them eventually attain the ideological goal of world communism, basically

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<sup>20</sup>In a brilliant discussion of these considerations, Robert Legvold has argued that "The Soviet Union does not see itself as only militarily potent and otherwise as economically disadvantaged, technologically deficient, bureaucratically sclerosed and so on. Its leaders admit to a broad range of problems and limitations but, where we constantly view these in terms of fundamental systemic weaknesses, they regard them as normal and corrigible defects." See "The Nature of Soviet Power," *Foreign Affairs* 56(1), p. 65.



because they have lost faith in the inherent vitality and appeal of that ideology.

The reading of Soviet statements on the correlation of forces that best accords with all the facts is one that credits the Soviets with attempts to derive greater success from the military factor while attempting to remedy deficiencies in other areas. This interpretation takes into account not only the evident Soviet military achievements but also the Soviet interest in negotiations and arrangements that would facilitate Western investments in (and technology transfers to) the U.S.S.R. and its East European allies. Such an interpretation suggests that, rather than single-mindedly pursuing strategic superiority, the Soviets have reason to combine an emphasis on the military instrument with a basically nonthreatening stance toward those who can help them improve their situation with regard to the nonmilitary dimensions of the correlation of forces.

c. Is Mum the Word? One final observation is pertinent. Thus far this chapter has been devoted mainly to examining what the Soviets have said and written for possible clues as to their evaluation of the foreign policy utility of strategic superiority. But it is also relevant to consider what they have refrained from saying or writing. Raymond Garthoff has noted, for example, that the Soviets were quite circumspect about the numerical edge (in launchers) that they were accorded in the interim agreement on offensive systems at the conclusion of SALT I.<sup>21</sup> They stressed instead the recognition in SALT I that the United States and the U.S.S.R. were strategic equals.

Igor Glagolev has said that:

The Politburo forbids Soviet specialists to make any mention of the protocol to the 1972 interim agreement precisely because the Soviet Union's superiority in SLBM's is acknowledged therein. At present, Soviet censors expunge from

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<sup>21</sup>See Garthoff, "SALT and the Soviet Military," *Problems of Communism* 24(1).

the works of Soviet scholars any mention of the general superiority of the U.S.S.R. in strategic or conventional armaments. This is very important to the Soviet leadership, for discussion of a "balance of forces" reassures both world public opinion and Washington.<sup>22</sup>

In some respects Glagolev's statements are an exaggeration, since, as earlier noted, the Soviets have not been quite that discrete--and certainly not sufficiently so as to discourage Western observers from utilizing their comments on the correlation of forces to raise alarms about the Soviet commitment to the goal of superiority. Nevertheless, the statements by Brezhnev, Ustinov, and Ogarkov cited earlier do reflect the basic circumspection which both Garthoff and Glagolev have pointed out. And even in the European theater context, as zealously as the Soviets appear to be guarding the conventional imbalance in their favor, they have gone to some lengths to deny any advantage.

It seems reasonable, therefore, to examine those cases in which Soviet superiority has been apparent in some particular area and the Soviets have chosen not to advertise the fact. The items in the SALT I Interim Agreement, for example, fit these criteria. With SALT in progress, it certainly makes sense for the Soviets to avoid boasting if only to allay the fears of those in the United States who are particularly suspicious of such negotiations. The Soviets are doubtless aware that some influential people in the United States are skeptical of SALT. The Institute of U.S. and Canadian Studies is presumably concerned with helping Soviet leaders attain a more realistic feel for American political dynamics in a situation where those dynamics are particularly important to the U.S.S.R. The Soviets certainly

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<sup>22</sup>Igor S. Glagolev, "The Soviet Decision-Making Process in Arms-Control Negotiations," *Orbis* (Winter 1978), p. 775.

showed themselves to be quite sensitive to what domestic traffic in the F.R.G. would bear when they were trying to capitalize on Brandt's Ostpolitik efforts during the European collective security campaign. In short, Soviet circumspection is reasonable in the general context of ongoing negotiations.

Beyond this, however, one suspects that a more general principle may be involved. The Soviets may quite simply realize that pride in the U.S.S.R.'s military achievements is best tempered with a little humility. It is one thing for SALT and other dealings to indicate that the U.S.S.R. is the strategic equal of the United States; it is quite another for the U.S.S.R. to boast of a basic strategic nuclear superiority over the United States. Even if the U.S.S.R. could make those claims good, the postwar period has provided plenty of reminders that such boastfulness can have counterproductive consequences. Both the bomber gap and the missile gap were induced by Soviet efforts to appear superior; both increased Soviet inferiority. Indeed, to the extent that Khrushchev's pride in Sputnik was responsible for precipitating a chain of events that led eventually to the Soviet attempt to create proxy ICBM's by emplacing M/IRBM's in Cuba, the current Soviet leaders are afforded a particularly bitter example of the fruits of earlier Soviet boastfulness. Claims which the U.S.S.R. was unwilling (or unable) to back helped bring on the Sino-Soviet split and brought the U.S.S.R. to the brink of war with the United States.

This does not necessarily mean, however, that the Soviets really are steadfastly pursuing the goal of strategic superiority over the United States but are, with perhaps some occasional slips of the tongue, shrewdly keeping mum about it. The above-noted occurrences would certainly militate for Soviet discretion, were the Soviets pursuing strategic superiority. But such incidents also have some other interesting implications with regard to the results of publicity.

Nonmilitary use of strategic superiority to achieve foreign policy gains requires that the condition of superiority first



be publicized. Paradoxically, however, such publicity seemingly would complicate the more subtle uses of superiority. Straightforward propaganda is certainly not the only means of publicity available to the Soviets. Nevertheless, it appears that the Soviets can conclude from the current situation that if they exercise some restraint in their use of propaganda (in order to minimize the potentially counterproductive effects of publicizing their superiority), those in the West who are alarmed at their strategic status and determined to see it countered will, ironically, trumpet it to the world for them.

### C. IMPLICATIONS

The foregoing overview of Soviet pronouncements (and silences) has several basic implications for future analyses of the problem of Soviet strategic superiority--especially the problem of determining the political significance of that superiority.

Because other sources of evidence, such as the historical record, have their own deficiencies, Soviet pronouncements in military (and other) writings and speeches pertinent to the topic can serve as a useful supplement to both information on Soviet defense activities (especially the nature and evolution of the weapons in the Soviet strategic buildup) and information on Soviet foreign policy activities. On the whole, however, Soviet pronouncements should be only supplementary to the analysis, as in general it is easy to treat them in a biased and selective manner. Particularly when the topic at hand is both historically unprecedented and one about which the Soviets have exercised some circumspection in their commentary, Soviet pronouncements can be misleading guides to Soviet perspectives.

Our brief examination of the concepts of the political nature of nuclear war and the correlation of forces, both of which have been focal points for Western analyses concluding that the Soviets would value superiority for its political

benefits, shows that these concepts are not irrelevant. Our examination also suggests, however, that they should be treated in a broader context. Viewing the concepts of the political nature of nuclear war and the correlation of forces through a narrow military (perhaps Western) lens encourages us to ignore the significance of the Soviet domestic and international political, economic, ideological, and social concerns that are bound up in the Soviet articulation of these concepts. Paying heed to these broader considerations does not suggest that the Soviets have little or no interest in attaining and exploiting strategic superiority for political purposes. But it does tend to show that the Soviets would at least have particular incentives both to pursue and exploit strategic superiority in ways that would minimize the image of overt and direct danger projected to the West.

This chapter is intended to make the aforementioned points only in tentative terms. Given the uncertainties and imponderables involved in utilizing Soviet pronouncements, even the most determined exegesis is unlikely to produce anything that can be regarded as a firm indication of Soviet perspectives on strategic superiority. Nevertheless, if these pronouncements are to be used--and they should be--the analyst should be prepared to (a) place current articulations of various concepts in an historical perspective;<sup>23</sup> (b) take into account, as well as possible, the domestic context--and possible domestic concerns--that may have figured in Soviet discussions of such concepts; and (c) juxtapose Soviet commentary with what the Soviets have actually been doing in the world, not only in strictly military but in foreign policy and economic realms as well.

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<sup>23</sup>A useful beginning has been made in Michael J. Deane, *The Soviet Concept of the Correlation of Forces*, SRI Project 4383 (May 1976), and Richard E. Pipes, *Correlation of Forces in Soviet Usage: Its Meaning and Implications*, SRI Project 4383 (March 1978).

## VI

### THE UTILITY OF DECISIONMAKING ANALYSES

While the use of decisionmaking analyses will not overcome all the obstacles encountered in any attempt to examine Soviet military questions, such analyses can still be beneficial. When used to examine U.S. foreign and defense programs and politics, decisionmaking analyses have been helpful in shedding light on such things as the reasons for U.S. international behavior or how particular U.S. weapons have come to be acquired.<sup>1</sup> Because Soviet behavior in general is rather puzzling, and particularly because the Soviets have often pursued weapons acquisition policies that are aberrant (or appear extraordinarily ominous) by the standards of U.S. strategic logic, it is tempting to hope that such studies may help illuminate these areas of Soviet behavior as well.

#### A. SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to attain a reasonable perspective on the utility of decisionmaking analyses, it is helpful to think of them as one means of assisting the analyst in determining what concerns, interests, and issues are most and least relevant to

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<sup>1</sup>The by-now classic study here is Graham Allison, *The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971). Of those decisionmaking studies that focus more pointedly on weapons acquisition (albeit to explore weapon program management efficiency and innovation issues), two excellent examples are Harvey M. Sapolsky, *The Polaris System Development: Bureaucratic and Programmatic Success in Government* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972) and Michael Armacost, *The Politics of Weapons Innovation: The Thor-Jupiter Controversy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).



interpretation of a governmental action. Any such action is in some way an activity that emerges from the process by which decisions in that government are made and implemented. Thus, if the analyst understands how the process works, he is better able to understand what are the pertinent concerns motivating a particular governmental action.

The assumed purpose behind any particular action can be quite narrow and well defined--for example, the idea that a particular Soviet missile is being deployed to knock out U.S. ICBM's--or it can be broad and amorphous--for example, that the U.S.S.R. is implementing certain policies in Africa in pursuit of the ultimate goal of world communism. The accuracy of the analyst's interpretation of an action will depend not only on whether "hard-target kill capability" or "world communism" are actual concerns in the U.S.S.R. but also on whether those concerns could have been determinants of the specific activity under consideration. It is because of this that the analyst's assumptions about the processes by which decisions are made are so important. If the analyst is arguing that (for example) Soviet policies in Africa are motivated by Soviet interest in the pursuit of world communism, he must be able to show as best he can that the process used was one enabling those in the U.S.S.R. who view the goal of world communism as important to have had the decisive voice. Otherwise, his interpretation depends partially on the implicit assumption that such has been the case.

Unfortunately, we must now point out that employing decision-making analyses in regard to Soviet actions--most especially in regard to actions in the particularly secretive Soviet defense sector--is more easily said than done. For one thing, the analyst must constantly guard against the inclination (fostered by the basic orientation of decisionmaking analysis) to confuse a description of how decisions are made with an explanation of why they are made. For example, recent attention to the

"bureaucratic" interpretation<sup>2</sup> of decisions was prompted by, among other things, dissatisfaction with the dominant "rational actor" interpretation, which essentially holds that states act as unitary, purposive actors, setting international goals and pursuing them. It is certainly useful to be reminded that the more parochial domestic interests that may enter into decisions sometimes far outweigh any consideration of rational international purpose. However, it makes no sense for an analyst to be carried away with the new insights afforded by using a bureaucratic outlook on defense and foreign policy issues to the detriment of the idea that it is also possible for states to set and pursue international goals, sometimes without being confounded by gamesmanship between and within various components of government.

Considering the context for any particular governmental decision in some depth should enable one to discriminate between those cases in which the rational actor interpretation makes more sense and those in which the bureaucratic interpretation appears to be more accurate. Unfortunately, when dealing with Soviet decisions, we often do not have access to enough information to determine the proper context. Moreover, it is very tempting for the analyst who feels that the rational actor view represents a more accurate description of how decisions are made simply to posit a credible goal that could have been set in pursuing a particular policy, rather than attempting also to explore what insights might be provided by utilizing other methodologies. By the same token, analysts who favor the bureaucratic interpretation can easily lose themselves in considerations of the decisionmaking setting and the various bureaucratic players. The analyst must remember that

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<sup>2</sup>Although analysts like Allison have given the bureaucratic interpretation a specific theoretical content, the term is used here to refer to those decisionmaking studies in which international purposes are at best a secondary focus.

the use of decisionmaking analysis does not require the choice of one methodology to the exclusion of another, thus determining in advance the explanation for the action being examined. The real contribution of such analysis should be that it enlarges the set of explanations we are considering, not limits it.

In an earlier study we discussed in some detail the merits of utilizing multiple decisionmaking approaches in analyzing Soviet strategic arms programs on a case-by-case basis.<sup>3</sup> The conclusion of that study is that all interpretations of Soviet defense and foreign policy programs and activities could probably benefit from being analyzed in decisionmaking terms--provided one does not prejudge the issue by regarding either the international goals or (more likely) the domestic interests and concerns involved as being either primary or exclusive sources of evidence. It is precisely because so little evidence is available that a decisionmaking outlook can be most helpful, and special care should be taken to avoid identifying such an outlook with one particular interpretation of why decisions are made.

Because so few data are available, it has been regarded as axiomatic to argue that decisionmaking analyses are simply not applicable in the Soviet defense setting. However, a preliminary case analysis of the SS-6 program (contained in the aforementioned study) indicates that utilizing decisionmaking approaches, even on an unclassified basis, can enable the analyst to get a better feel for the range of determinants that may affect Soviet arms programs than he is likely to achieve by relying on an approach that ignores or slights decisionmaking considerations. Moreover, it seems somewhat foolish to contend that because of data deficiencies we cannot attempt a

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<sup>3</sup>Karl F. Spielmann, *Analyzing Soviet Strategic Arms Decisions*, IDA Paper P-1256. The study is also available in an expanded version under the same title as a Westview Press special study (Boulder, Colo., 1978). The current analysis draws heavily on this study and readers interested in additional details or bibliographic reference should refer to it.



deliberate look at the decisionmaking context for a particular Soviet defense decision when, regardless of such deficiencies, our interpretations of such decisions are based on certain assumptions about the relevant decisionmaking process. It makes more sense in a data-poor setting to try to treat explicitly what we regularly accept implicitly, in order to ensure that pertinent evidence is not overlooked and that we do not become so comfortable with our assumptions that they carry the analysis largely on their own. This does not mean that decisionmaking studies of the kind that might be done in data-rich settings of the West are likely to be feasible for the Soviet setting. It does mean that the basic utility of Soviet decisionmaking studies should not be determined by comparing them with what can be done in the Western setting, especially as other methods of analyzing Soviet behavior are not subjected to similar comparative standards.

#### B. DECISIONMAKING ANALYSES AND THE SOVIET STRATEGIC SUPERIORITY PROBLEM

Because the Soviet strategic buildup is so difficult to account for, it would seem to be a particularly good candidate for treatment in decisionmaking terms. While such analysis may not be able to reveal the precise reasons behind the buildup, it can certainly be helpful in illuminating the extent to which a Soviet belief in the foreign policy utility of strategic superiority has entered into the process. No effort will be made here to utilize decisionmaking approaches to evaluate the comparative validity of various explanations for even the key programs in the Soviet strategic buildup. Such an effort should be undertaken, however, in future analyses. For the present, the basic question to be addressed is this: Can decisionmaking analyses be of assistance in determining whether the Soviets would value strategic superiority for its foreign policy utility?

## 1. The Relevance of a National Leadership Perspective

The aforementioned study describes a strategic decision-making perspective that seems particularly relevant. This perspective is based on the idea that Soviet leaders behave as "national leaders," having sufficient power and authority to make military decisions without necessarily succumbing to parochial pressures, but also having sufficient breadth of concern to make such decisions on more than narrowly military grounds. As described in the study, this perspective

...means focusing on the Soviet leaders, not just as strategic calculators, not just as individuals who might succumb to constituent pressures, but as leaders who have a country to run, as well as defense policies to pursue, and who therefore may have particular preferences with regard to economic, political and other concerns that could impact on their judgments on defense decisions.<sup>4</sup>

The particular personal preferences leaders might have for specific domestic Soviet programs (agricultural mechanization in the case of Khrushchev; consumer goods in the case of Kosygin) are less significant in this case than the fact that their personal concerns would militate for certain general foreign policy goals. In examining the first Soviet ICBM program by using three different decisionmaking approaches, the study found that Khrushchev's personal concern with the Soviet space program and his appreciation of its foreign policy utility may well have been the factor that helped inhibit sizable deployment of the SS-6.

Since other studies<sup>5</sup> have called attention to the Soviet exploitation of Sputnik for foreign policy purposes--as well as Khrushchev's related braggadocio about the pace of Soviet missile efforts--obviously that finding in itself is not any great

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<sup>4</sup>Speilmann, *Analyzing Soviet Strategic Arms Decisions*, p. 113.

<sup>5</sup>Most notably Horelick and Rush, *Strategic Power and Soviet Foreign Policy*.

revelation made possible only by the national leadership decisionmaking approach. Nor can it be claimed more generally that this particular decisionmaking approach is the first to call attention to the fact that foreign policy activities may stem from the personal concerns of Soviet leaders<sup>6</sup> or derive from bureaucratic infighting in Soviet political circles.<sup>7</sup> It is not even the first attempt to advocate that Soviet foreign policy (or defense) activities should be looked at in decision-making terms.<sup>8</sup>

Rather, the general contribution of the national leadership approach is threefold. First, it suggests some of the decisionmaking possibilities that are not readily apparent if one approaches Soviet defense (especially strategic arms) decisions from either a militarily oriented rational actor perspective or a decisionmaking perspective that stresses organizational interests or bureaucratic infighting. Second, it relates broader foreign policy considerations more directly and more plausibly to such decisions than the other decision-making perspectives seem likely to do. And third, it demonstrates the relationships among certain diverse decisionmaking factors,

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<sup>6</sup>For example, many studies on the Sino-Soviet dispute emphasize Khrushchev's concern with his ideological credentials as a factor prompting and shaping Soviet foreign policy. See in this regard William E. Griffith, *Sino-Soviet Relations, 1964-65* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1967); Richard Lowenthal, *World Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); Donald Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956-1961* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), and David Floyd, *Mao Against Khrushchev* (New York: Praeger, 1963).

<sup>7</sup>See Robert Slusser, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Soviet-American Relations and the Struggle for Power in the Kremlin* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1973) and "Case Studies: The Berlin Crises of 1958-1959 and 1961," in Blechman and Kaplan, *The Use of Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*.

<sup>8</sup>The best overall case is presented in Arnold L. Horelick, A. Ross Johnson, and John D. Steinbruner, *The Study of Soviet Foreign Policy: A Review of Decision-Theory-Related Approaches*, R-1334 (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, 1973).



considering as a discrete set of variables factors that otherwise would be considered separately and might even be placed in opposition to each other as supporting different decisionmaking outlooks. For present purposes, however, what is most pertinent is that the national leadership approach highlights the Soviet leaders' attentiveness to the general foreign policy concerns that could determine the Soviet assessment of the value of strategic superiority--something which is neither particularly encouraged by nor readily consistent with a bureaucratic or (more important) a rational actor perspective on Soviet strategic arms decisions.

It should be stressed that a decisionmaking approach is not necessary to sensitize the analyst to the general relevance of foreign policy considerations to an explanation of the Soviet strategic arms buildup. Such writers as Raymond Garthoff and Colin Gray have called attention to the fact that the Soviets brought an apparently more political attitude to the SALT bargaining table than did the United States.<sup>9</sup> Other Western observers have also noted the SALT process and its relationship to decisions on Soviet strategic arms.<sup>10</sup> And we can hardly argue

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<sup>9</sup> In contrasting the Soviet and U.S. approaches, Garthoff has noted that in the case of the United States "the stress was on highly specific measures reflecting often arcane turning of the military balance in an endeavor to enhance strategic stability. The Soviet approach, on the other hand, aimed at general American acceptance of the rough strategic parity that has been achieved, and at a general restraint on military buildup while accepting political detente." Raymond Garthoff, "Negotiating with the Russians: Some Lessons from SALT," *International Security* 1(4), pp. 5-6. Of Colin Gray's numerous reminders of the significance of political concerns, one of the most pertinent is "The Arms Race is About Politics," *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1972-73), pp. 117-29.

<sup>10</sup> Garthoff has made a notable contribution here in his "SALT and the Soviet Military." Other significant studies are Thomas W. Wolfe, *The SALT Experience and its Impact on U.S. and Soviet Strategic Policy and Decisionmaking*, R-1686 (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, 1975); Center for Strategic and International Studies, (continued on next page)

that one cannot examine the political factor in considering the problem of Soviet strategic superiority unless one specifically uses decisionmaking theories, since indicating ways to assess the political factor is precisely what we have been trying to do in the preceding pages of this study. Nevertheless, certain decisionmaking considerations can enhance our sensitivity to the political factors inherent in Soviet perspectives on military issues, especially strategic arms issues.

## 2. Soviet Attentiveness to Image Considerations

A recent study by Edward Luttwak calls attention to a non-military aspect of the strategic buildup that is apparently revelatory of the Soviet interest in strategic superiority.<sup>11</sup> Luttwak's basic focus in the study is the U.S. side of the strategic equation, but by way of arguing that more attention should be given to image considerations in U.S. defense planning, he asserts that the Soviets are very attentive to such considerations. As he puts it:

In comparing the overall strategic conduct of the United States with that of the Soviet Union, a sharp contrast emerges between the obvious Russian emphasis on the psychological dimensions of military policy, and the equally obvious neglect of this dimension in the military policy of the United States.... For example, the entire structure of the Soviet armed forces reveals the intention to capitalize systematically on the

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(cont'd) Georgetown University, *Soviet Decisionmaking, Strategic Policy and SALT*, ACDA/DAB-243 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1974); and Roman Kolkowicz et al., *The Soviet Union and Arms Control: A Superpower Dilemma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).

<sup>11</sup> *The Missing Dimension of U.S. Defense Policy: Force Perceptions and Power*, prepared for the Essex Corporation, Arlington, Va. (February 1976), under DARPA Contract MDA-903-75-C-0227. An abbreviated version is available as "Perceptions of Military Force and U.S. Defense Policy," *Survival* (January-February 1977), pp. 2-8.

widespread tendency to evaluate military power in simple numerical terms; American force planners, by contrast, tend to be guided by organizational preferences for high unit-quality, and tend to discount numbers per se.<sup>12</sup>

Luttwak goes on to maintain that:

With a consistency that would be remarkable, if it were accidental, Russian force-structure decisions have tended to maximize the perceptible manifestations of Soviet military power, while an equally consistent neglect of perceptual factors is evident from the character of American force structures. Far from being an isolated exception, the contrast between unilateral withdrawal of the Minuteman I force and the retention of the Soviet SS-7s and SS-8s [reflecting the Soviet appreciation of retaining systems in inventory because of the psychological impact on others of sheer numbers] ... is reproduced in virtually every sector of military power, from the number of army divisions [reflecting a Soviet concern with enhancing the image of power by having smaller divisions than the U.S. but more of them] ... to the armament of surface combatants....<sup>13</sup>

which the author argues is reflected in the Soviet surface fleet's reliance on the nonreloadable SSM launcher, which permits more ships to be deployed more quickly because it is a system that is less demanding of tonnage for direct platform and escort needs. The Luttwak message generally seems to be that while Soviet decisions to develop, deploy, and retain a weapon are influenced by an awareness of what image of power that weapon projects, the United States tends to ignore such considerations and instead only emphasizes criteria of combat-effectiveness.

If Luttwak is basically correct in his identification of image considerations as a Soviet concern, then potential political utility would appear to have become a pervasive element in Soviet decisions concerning strategic arms. Not only have

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 6.



possible foreign policy ramifications apparently dictated Soviet efforts to combine an accommodationist foreign policy stance with arms buildups and shaped the Soviet approach to SALT, but it would seem that these political concerns have also shaped and defined the actual composition of the buildups. Moreover, the reasons for Soviet reticence in certain areas become somewhat clearer. Insofar as the Soviets can convey the desired message through deployments that project the image of strength by numbers (of systems and divisions) or size (in the form of large missiles like the SS-9, SS-18, or SS-19), then the Soviets need not advertise that the U.S.S.R. has this or that edge over the United States.

Because Soviet image considerations apparently have a direct relevance to the Soviet strategic buildup and thus to possible Soviet interest in strategic superiority, such considerations deserve further systematic attention. Luttwak's analysis strongly implies that the Soviets might very well value strategic superiority, or at least the reputation of possessing superiority, for political reasons--even if it should turn out that superiority would not seem to mean much in terms of its actual utility in combat situations.

The Luttwak analysis is particularly relevant for another reason, as well. The characteristics of the Soviet approach to military force structure (especially strategic force structure) design and planning that Luttwak emphasizes are not particularly congruent with some long-standing Western assumptions about the Soviet defense decisionmaking setting. Perhaps the key assumption that Luttwak's analysis challenges is that in the U.S.S.R. strategic analysis and planning are basically the business of the military. Khrushchev's ill-advised meddling in the late 1950's and early 1960's has been regarded as probably an exception to the rule that it is the professional military who are entrusted with the task of setting the military goals of the Soviet state, formulating the doctrine, and figuring out the systems that are needed. (When military needs

are integrated into the overall goals of the state, the political leadership presumably weighs and finally determines the priorities.)

This is the assumed Soviet defense decisionmaking context that is widely accepted by Western observers. It is, on the whole, a context congruent with the decisionmaking theory holding that the Soviet Union behaves as a rational actor in formulating its strategic arms programs and policies, at least in the sense that the political leadership relies on the expertise of the professional military to set appropriate strategic goals and devise weapons programs and policies accordingly. It is also a context that allows us to use the bureaucratic-organizational process approach to analyzing Soviet strategic arms efforts, insofar as it emphasizes the parochial interests and the bureaucratic infighting of the various components of the Soviet military establishment (including the defense-industrial bailiwick). This context is frequently contrasted to the U.S. defense decisionmaking context, where much is made of the role of civilians vis-à-vis that of the professional military and, in particular, the role of civilians in developing, refining, and guiding American strategic thinking. Indeed, it is often held that this difference between the Soviet and U.S. defense decisionmaking environments is in large part responsible for the fact that the Soviets subscribe to a war-fighting and war-winning strategic outlook, while the United States has remained more singularly committed to deterrence.<sup>14</sup>

This contrast between the Soviet and U.S. defense decisionmaking context does not seem unreasonable, nor does the inference drawn about the relationship of the decisionmaking contexts to differences in U.S. and Soviet strategic thinking seem particularly unreasonable either. However, the Luttwak

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<sup>14</sup>A basic articulation of this point of view can be found in Pipes, "Why the Soviet Union Thinks It Could Fight and Win a Nuclear War."

analysis, rather than confirming these traditional assumptions, suggests almost the opposite set of images. One would expect to find the professional military on top in the United States, given the emphasis on combat-effectiveness criteria that Luttwak asserts. And it would be the Soviet Union's force structure that would reflect the presence of a large civilian component in the decisionmaking context, given the politically oriented image considerations that apparently infuse Soviet force structure design and planning.

The contradiction here is obvious.<sup>15</sup> It is possible that Luttwak is in error when he credits the Soviets with a concern with the political implications of their military image. It is also possible that the West's long-standing assumptions about how military decisions are made in the U.S.S.R. are erroneous. At the very least, however, this contradiction suggests that for analysts to explore most thoroughly those phenomena relevant to Soviet perspectives on the utility of strategic superiority, it may be most helpful to consider the use of a different method of decisionmaking analysis--one that does not depend so heavily for its utility on traditional assumptions about the Soviet defense decisionmaking process.

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<sup>15</sup>This is not to suggest that even without substantial investigation Luttwak's particular examples cannot be faulted. For one thing, some attention should be paid to the technical constraints that may have reinforced an emphasis on bigness in early Soviet missiles, for example. It is often argued that because of deficiencies in Soviet warhead technology (that made smaller warheads less feasible), large launchers were needed. Similarly, with regard to Luttwak's emphasis on Soviet division "sizing" as a political image consideration, it is worth noting that others have argued that specific military objectives and concerns can be held responsible for the divergence in Soviet and American outlooks. If, for example, the Soviets were banking on speed and maneuverability, rather than staying power, reflecting their distaste for a prolonged campaign in Europe, minimal logistics support would make some sense. It might further be noted that in recent years the Soviets have shown some signs of departing from earlier division sizing notions.



This particular case is one in which analysis of Soviet strategic arms programs from the standpoint of the national leadership approach to decisionmaking analysis may be helpful. While that approach does not deny the Soviet professional military their role in articulating doctrine and setting specific military goals and objectives, it does assign to civilians--certainly those at the top of the policy-making hierarchy--a more important and autonomous role in the process.

This approach does not assume that the professional military will not offer advice on strategic arms matters that reflects an awareness of the potential political utility of a new system. After all, that sort of political sensitivity does seem to be present in the military establishment.<sup>16</sup> It does mean, however, that much more attention is devoted to determining how

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<sup>16</sup>Insofar as a bureaucratic perspective focuses on service interests and standard operating procedures, it cannot really be expected to direct much attention to foreign policy objectives--even as a rationalization for such interests. Proponents for a new weapon system would more likely try to "sell" the system within the Soviet defense bailiwick by stressing the specific military advantages (and overall military utility) of the system. However, as suggested by recent writings on the role of the Soviet Navy, there may nevertheless be some bureaucratic proponents of new Soviet weapons and policies in the Soviet defense sector who appreciate the value of arguing the case in broader foreign policy terms. But whether this is unique to the Navy and how significant it really is, and has been, for Naval programs are still open questions--and in consequence worth more analytical attention. See, in this regard, Admiral S. G. Gorshkov, *Red Star Rising at Sea* (Theodore A. Neely, Jr., trans. by U.S. Naval Institute, 1974) and *The Sea Power of the State* (Moscow, 1976). For a small sample of the Western debate about the foreign policy role and utility of the Soviet Navy see R. W. Herrick, *Soviet Naval Strategy: Fifty Years of Theory and Practice* (Annapolis, Md.: U.S. Naval Institute, 1968); Michael McGwire, "The Background to Soviet Naval Deployments," *World Today* (March 1971); R. G. Weinland, "The Changing Mission of the Soviet Navy," *Survival*, 14(3); J. M. McConnell and Anne M. Kelly, *Superpower Naval Diplomacy in the Indo-Pakistani Crisis*, Center for Naval Analyses, Professional Paper No. 108 (February 1973); and the contributions to *Soviet Naval Influence: Domestic and Foreign Dimensions*, Michael McGwire and John McConnell, eds. (New York: Praeger, 1977).

influential more parochial ideological, foreign policy, economic, and other concerns are for key Soviet leaders, acting as national leaders, in shaping their perspectives on the kind, level, timing, and location of strategic arms deployments.

It would be unwise to adopt this approach as the only one appropriate to a decisionmaking analysis of Soviet strategic arms efforts. The approach may provide the most plausible explanation in some instances; in others it may not. Combat-effectiveness may be the primary or even the only criterion for some Soviet strategic arms decisions; in that event the more narrowly focused rational actor perspective would be more appropriate. In other cases the decision may be the combined product of the broader political concerns of the civilian leadership and fairly stringent military considerations. More than one approach would be useful in that case. On the whole, it thus seems reasonable to argue that as the kinds of political considerations that Luttwak has adduced should be included in analysis and assessment of the Soviet strategic superiority problem, the national leadership approach (or something like it) should be considered as an additional analytic tool.

### C. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The foregoing consideration of the usefulness of decision-making analyses to an assessment of the significance the Soviets may attach to strategic superiority has yielded several conclusions and some interesting implications. Decisionmaking analyses can offer only limited possibilities for discerning the intentions behind the Soviet strategic arms buildup. This conclusion also holds for the use of such analyses to determine what the Soviets would try to do with strategic superiority should they attain it, and whether such uses would be important enough for them actively to seek



strategic superiority. These questions cannot be satisfactorily answered by the use of decisionmaking analyses, because among other things, data constraints, which are particularly severe with respect to the Soviet defense sector, deny the analyst the requisite information to carry decision-making analyses very far.

These same data constraints, however, also make it important for the analyst to try to approach Soviet strategic arms efforts in decisionmaking terms. Since all interpretations of the intentions behind these efforts rest on implicit assumptions about Soviet defense decisionmaking processes, it would be both contradictory and analytically myopic to contend that determined attempts to look at these processes are useless because of the data constraint problem, while other interpretive exercises that are affected by these very same data deficiencies proceed. It would appear to be most productive to approach Soviet strategic arms efforts with a decisionmaking outlook that is calculated to focus attention on more than narrow military concerns or parochial bureaucratic and organizational interests--provided, of course, that such an outlook is consonant with the discernible "realities" of the Soviet defense decisionmaking setting.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Elsewhere we have mentioned that the Soviets might view the political utility of strategic arms in rather broad and amorphous terms, and that this may be in part a consequence of a lack of civilian strategic analysts. In this connection, Arthur Alexander has pointed out an aspect of the Soviet decision-making setting that also makes assumption of such a view seem plausible: "If it is the case that the Defense Council [the highest body dealing with national security matters in the U.S.S.R.] must rely on the military for advice and expertise, political inputs into military-political decisionmaking are deprived of an independent analytical foundation and would therefore follow military desires in most detailed matters, or fall back on *broader political judgments* for the rarer disagreements with military advice [emphasis added]." Arthur J. Alexander *Decisionmaking in Soviet Weapons Procurement* (Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation, 1978), p. 61.



The fact that such a decisionmaking approach has been formulated, and that it provides a context in which the pervasive impact of the image considerations suggested by Luttwak seems plausible, implies that strategic superiority may indeed be of value to the Soviets--whether or not it seems to make much sense according to strictly military calculations, be they Soviet or American.

At the same time, it is important to stress that both in the case of Luttwak's observations and in the case of the development and application of the national leadership approach, only the earliest, most tentative steps have been taken. Much more can and should be attempted. Moreover, insofar as this may indicate that the Soviets would value strategic superiority for its foreign policy utility, it may very well mean that predictions of potentially malevolent and threatening Soviet exploitation of strategic superiority should be discounted. For although it is conceivable that the pace and scope of Soviet strategic efforts do represent a more narrowly focused military attempt to achieve the combat payoffs of superiority combined with nonmilitary aspirations for superiority's political returns, such a combination is open to question. It does not make all that much sense for Soviet leaders to orient their efforts toward gaining the kind of (perhaps unattainable) superiority that would really be needed to win the war when at the same time they seriously entertain the hope that with less cost and with much less risk, a superiority can be secured to enable them to win the peace. Needless to say, the accuracy of this perspective depends on Soviet views of the requirements of successful warfighting in the nuclear age--a topic which, as noted, has thus far been discussed but not systematically analyzed.

## VII

### CONCLUSION

There indeed appears to be some basis for postulating that the Soviets value strategic superiority for its political utility and seek it for that purpose. Such superiority in strategic nuclear might is valuable as a background factor of international politics, as latent and amorphous power that may best be exploited by relatively accommodationist policies rather than by direct or threatened use.<sup>1</sup> This implies that the political utility that the Soviets might find in strategic superiority would probably not encourage them to initiate a nuclear conflict or engage in confrontations or attempt nuclear blackmail.

Arguing that by certain Western deterrence notions superiority is meaningless begs the question of whether the Soviets are seeking to attain it and why. There is enough to suggest, however, that the kind of superiority the Soviets might seek and the ways they would try to exploit it cannot readily be derived by presupposing a narrowly military and overtly threatening Soviet perspective on strategic nuclear might. This does not mean that the Soviets might not value strategic superiority in these terms as well. It does mean that to the extent that our representation of the Soviet view of superiority is accurate, it would imply less Soviet temptation, rather than more, to

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<sup>1</sup>This idea has been mentioned in various other studies, cited above. Our contribution is to have begun mustering support for the idea as a *Soviet* idea and thereby determining some of the implications of Soviet adherence to it.

seek superiority in order to exploit it in overt and threatening ways.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, however, it would be both presumptuous and contradictory to assert that this study can offer more than a tentative conclusion at this point. For one thing, a number of pertinent topics have simply been mentioned, not explored in depth. The relevance of the Cuban and Chinese analogs has only been sketched. No substantial assessment of the Soviet deterrence concept has been attempted. Only two doctrinal topics have been examined in any detail. Other Soviet military efforts that might bear on this determination, such as the Soviet buildup in Europe, Soviet use of Cuban proxies, and the Soviet blue water navy, have been only cursorily treated. And, finally, no real assessment of the significance the Soviets might attach to strategic superiority is possible without a determined examination of the other possible explanations for the various programs that are part of the Soviet strategic buildup.

This study has deliberately avoided any detailed recitation or examination of the various components of that buildup. More than enough studies of that sort have already been carried out by other analysts of the Soviet strategic superiority problem. Indeed, our interest in the topic seems at times almost obsessive, which perhaps reveals as much about our own preconceptions of what is important in the strategic arms arena as it does about what matters to the Soviets. Certainly from the standpoint of gauging the ultimate threat, such attention makes very good sense. Prospective military threats and dangers should receive priority treatment. What this study has considered to be pertinent, however, is simply the fact of the

<sup>2</sup>It bears repeating in this regard that an evaluation of Soviet incentives for such exploitation should carefully explore Soviet perspectives on the relationship between war-fighting needs and deterrence requirements (see pp. 25ff).



Soviet strategic buildup, the fact that that buildup makes some kind of Soviet superiority a more and more realistic prospect, and the fact that the vulnerability of the ICBM component of the U.S. strategic triad seems to be a matter of particular concern in the context of this Soviet buildup.

Beyond these facts, however, present purposes would not have been served by the detailed recitations and evaluations of weapons characteristics and deployments that tend to dominate other examinations of the foreign policy significance of Soviet strategic superiority and make military their consideration of the political. Moreover, we should bear in mind that, no matter how impressive an array of details we have about Soviet weapons programs, we simply do not know at what point the Soviets will conclude that they have attained some kind of exploitable superiority. We may have the numbers to prove that they have achieved what we would regard as superiority, but those numbers may not be the ones that the Soviets are looking for.

Regardless of whether superiority is the ultimate goal of the Soviet buildup, it is of course prudent for the West to take whatever remedial action seems appropriate to deal with Soviet capabilities as capabilities. Of course, analysis of the evolution of Soviet capabilities is not without its pitfalls. But it is when commentators conjure up all kinds of intentions to go with these capabilities that analysts should be particularly on guard. Western commentators must make a case for Soviet intentions by producing more than simple assertions of faith that the Soviets are going to act in certain ways. It is not always easy to separate recommendations based on an assessment of capabilities from recommendations based on an assessment of intention, because the two tend to get mixed together. Nevertheless, by examining the kinds of arguments used, it is not difficult to detect when judgments are being supported by reference to subject matter that is salient to the question of intentions. The potential significance of Soviet strategic

superiority for long-term Western security and welfare is too great for advocates of vigilance to content themselves with shoddy arguments and for skeptics to allow them to do so.

In this study we have on the whole been critical of those who might be characterized as the advocates of vigilance. This is because these commentators have been derelict in their duty. If the Soviets are said to pursue the goal of strategic superiority, then these advocates must make their case by effectively describing that goal and backing up their description--in Soviet, not American terms. This study has been critical of mirror-imagers in this regard, perhaps unexpectedly. Nowadays the sin of mirror-imaging has been visited mainly on the heads of those holdovers from the early SALT era who assumed the Soviets would absorb American strategic logic, particularly concerning the desirability of an MAD posture, and settle for the kind and level of strategic armaments that would assure the U.S.S.R. of a secure second-strike capability and reassure the world that the U.S.S.R. was committed to the goal of maintaining stable mutual deterrence.<sup>3</sup>

However, mirror-imaging has rather more practitioners than one might expect if one heeds the words of those who inveigh most strongly against it. One can just as easily mirror-image what Soviet counterforce capabilities imply as a departure from the MAD concept, for example, as one can mirror-image by arguing the Soviet subscription to that concept. It will not do merely to assume that what appears to us more ominous is ipso facto more truly Soviet. Indeed, because we in the West are neither Politburo members nor members of the Soviet General Staff nor just plain Soviet, we are bound to practice mirror-imaging to a certain extent. And unless we assume that the

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<sup>3</sup>In an earlier book, Matthew Gallagher and the author particularly sought to identify and caution against the effects of such mirror-imaging. See *Soviet Decisionmaking for Defense: A Critique of U.S. Perspectives on the Arms Race* (New York: Praeger, 1972).

Soviets are completely different from us, the mirror-image will sometimes be quite accurate, and the technique useful. The problem is to determine when this will be the case; making a fetish of Soviet uniqueness clearly does little to solve it. Moreover, our determination of what it is that is unique about the Soviets is biased since, after all, it is we, not they, who are making it.

In the final analysis, however, it seems that the advocates of vigilance are not the only ones needing to put their analytical house in order. Notwithstanding the avowedly preliminary nature of this study, it does on the whole lend greater support to the idea that the Soviets would be more likely to value and try to exploit strategic superiority for political purposes than that they would not. This conclusion, as noted, also points to a Soviet perception of that goal which is less overtly threatening and dangerous than has been indicated in studies conducted thus far. Precisely because the threat is less overt, however, coping with it may be a much greater and more difficult challenge, calling for more subtle and complex measures than a straightforward military response--or at best a straightforward response at the level of strategic weapons.

Because the problem of determining Soviet intentions is so complex and amorphous, this point of view--like all others on this subject--must be investigated more thoroughly. We are not being facetious when we suggest that this is a case where it would be appropriate for the advocates of vigilance to respond to the question we have posed, "Why should the Soviets seek strategic superiority?" with another question--"Why not?" As we have indicated in this study, it will not suffice to state that such superiority ultimately is militarily senseless, whether such a statement is based on standards of Western strategic theory or even strictly Soviet military terms. Nor will it do simply to trot out arguments that maintain there is a built-in counter to any Soviet urge toward strategic superiority based on the famous action-reaction hypothesis, much



touted in Western arms control literature. The popularity of that hypothesis has thus far not been matched by analyses showing that Soviet responsiveness to U.S. strategic effort is a prime mover of the Soviet arms buildup. Hence, it has yet to be shown that U.S. strategic arms forbearance will deprive the Soviets of a necessary impetus toward further buildup. Still less has there been any effective support for the argument that the Soviets really appreciate the possible U.S. reaction to their actions--at least enough to slow the momentum of their strategic arms efforts in expectation of a counterproductive U.S. response. It is thus just as important to prove lack of intention as it is to prove intention with respect to the Soviet strategic superiority problem, and in both respects there is more than enough work for all. It is hoped that we have provided analysts of various persuasions with some guidelines for their proof.